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Hunter's Guide

to



SOUTHEASTERN MONTANA

Montana Department of
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HUNTER'S GUIDE to SOUTHEASTERN MONTANA

Prepared by

KEN WALCHECK

Information Officer
Miles City Regional Office
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Acknowledgment

Antlers up! To all you sportsmen whose license dollars and support made this bulletin about the prairie country and its biological factories possible. Our sincerest 5-point thanks.

To my colleagues in Region Seven, a sincere thanks to all - whether you worked behind a typewriter, on a deer drive-net trapping assignment or with computers, on the floor at Fish and Game Commission meetings or at Rod and Gun Club meetings, at check stations, or on research assignments with radio collars or jaw spreaders or rifles or binoculars.

We are most grateful to pass on some information about a piece of real estate that has a distinct stamp and one that is difficult to take true measure of, until you learn to appreciate and respect it for its true worth.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kenneth C. Walcheck". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Kenneth C. Walcheck
Information Officer

Contents

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SOME FACTS ABOUT SOUTHEASTERN MONTANA.....	4
FINDING A PLACE TO HUNT.....	6
DEPARTMENT-CONTROLLED LANDS IN REGION 7.....	8
SELECTING A MAP TO ASSIST YOU.....	11
QUESTIONS COMMONLY ASKED BY HUNTERS.....	14
TIPS TO PREVENT A RUINED HUNT.....	17
THE RESPONSIBLE HUNTER.....	21
MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION.....	22
DEER AND ANTELOPE HUNTING.....	24
Mule Deer.....	28
White-tailed Deer.....	31
Pronghorn.....	37
Field Care of Deer and Antelope Meat.....	43
UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING.....	45
Merriam's Turkey.....	47
Ring-necked Pheasant.....	51
Sharp-tailed Grouse.....	54
Sage Grouse.....	57
Hungarian (Gray) Partridge.....	60
Mourning Dove.....	61
Additional Information on Upland Game Bird Hunting.....	63
Hunting Dogs.....	64

WATERFOWL.....	65
Geese.....	65
Ducks.....	66
The Conscientious Waterfowler.....	67
ENDANGERED VISITORS.....	68
HUNTER ALERT NETWORK AND EMERGENCY FORM.....	69
SUNRISE-SUNSET TABLES FOR DETERMINING HUNTING HOURS.....	70

Introduction

Hunting in Montana is a very personal endeavor. In the Big Sky Country, we understand fully that the definition of the 'total' outdoor experience varies from one hunter to another. Still, we can confidently claim that when it comes to wildlife diversity and hunting opportunities, southeastern Montana has a wealth of selections to satisfy nearly anyone. Something for the man who cherishes hunting a wide selection of big game, waterfowl and upland game birds in an incredible diversity of topographic extremes and habitats; something for the woman who appreciates the prairie country's sweeping scenery, its diverse ecosystems and its abundance of elbowroom; something for the youngster that defies interpretation such as the electrifying thunder of a boss gobbler sounding off on a pine-studded ridge; and something for nearly everyone else.

To some, the prairie country of southeastern Montana seems an improbable kind of place--a land of extremes. Some, in fact, have labeled it as 'the big ugly, a monotonous wasteland.'

Part of that impression seems to be valid enough, at least on the surface. The area does appear to have more than its share of seemingly monotonous, wandering rangelands, capricious weather patterns, eroded badlands and mineral-laden waters. No argument there. Yet many impressions are gained by those who have never opened their eyes to the vast beauty and richness that surrounds them. From any angle, it occupies stage center, fixing attention with that strange magnetic quality that can always be felt but never fully explained, that sure quality of uniqueness.



This is a rugged and thirsty land. Yet, ironically, water made it what it is. Water formed its rocks in the beds of Cretaceous seas. It sculptured its ridges, gnawed mazes of steep-walled coulees and alluvial valleys and stripped away its flesh, leaving a sea of jumbled geologic skeletons. Water laid down its soils, and nurtured its plant and animal life, as it was monitored by the master hand of climate.

Those who really know the prairie country recognize it as the kind of land that can make a person feel small. It's also a place where a hunter can encounter a haunting quiet, a place where he can feel at home with ancient and mysterious rhythms, a place that offers a diversity of living complexities and wonders. This is a country 'where the sky comes down the same distance all around.' Those who call the land 'home' appreciate its sweeping scenery, its diverse ecosystems and its abundance of elbowroom.

There is a beauty of the prairie country that defies interpretation. There's the big sky, as an example - a great unobstructed amphitheater by night with billions of bright stars. By day, approaching thunderheads are massive and ferociously beautiful, a black swirl of clouds moving at you, just above the rolling sagebrush, on spider-legs of lightning.

The prairie country holds another kind of beauty, a well-kept secret. To take a true measure of it, you have to spend some time there to fully appreciate how it grips the soul more than it pleases the eye.

If southeastern Montana is a land of extremes, it is also one of wildlife. In fact, few places on the continent can boast of such a diversity of habitats and such a wide array of animal species.

It's a well established fact that the quality and quantity of available habitat in an area controls the quality and quantity of the wildlife that area will produce. This being the case, southeastern Montana must have a good supply of quality habitat.

And so it does! That the prairie country has been endowed with a generous measure of high-quality habitat is evidenced by the fact that southeastern Montana has long been recognized as a top-notch wildlife producer. Even if you aren't a hunter, it soon becomes apparent that the right ecological formulas exist in the region to make it a 'bread and butter' factory for producing deer and antelope, upland game birds and Canada geese.

The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks can best ensure quality wildlife experiences by providing for a wide variety of wildlife-related recreational opportunities and by managing the distribution of hunters and other wildlife users in time and space. Sportsmen have a growing and equal responsibility to join together to protect wildlife habitat and support wise uses of this resource. A concerted effort is required by all if our wildlife heritage is to maintain a prominent position in Montana's future.



Whether your hunting fancy leans toward calling Canada geese within range of your decoys, stalking a trophy pronghorn buck, rattling a hat-rack whitetail to your stand or coaxing a Merriam's gobbler within range during the spring turkey season, southeastern Montana can offer you an impressive selection of hunting opportunities.

This 'Hunter's Guide to Southeastern Montana' has been designed primarily for just that--hunters. In it we have attempted to provide enough information to make your trip more pleasant as well as productive, but not enough to take all the fun out of discovering the wonderful hunting opportunities the region has to offer. Since bag limits, district boundaries, license fees, and other regulations are subject to change, we have steered away from providing this kind of information. For specifics on these subjects, please refer to the hunting regulations published annually by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The State of Montana is widely recognized for its staunch approach toward environmental protection and preservation of its natural resources. Concern with conservation of its wildlife resources is deeply rooted in the state's history, and this concern is reflected in major legislation, as well as in the hearts of the state's citizenry. Montanans are fortunate that past legislatures had the foresight to establish ways to protect and manage the state's many species of wildlife and their habitats, as well as other significant cultural, scientific and recreational resources.

But perhaps more importantly, such foresightedness will provide the opportunity for an inquisitive, bright-eyed youth of the future to run up to a seasoned hunter coming out of the hills and ask: "What did you see on your hunt? Are the mule deer in full rut yet? Have the geese started their fall migration?"

And the veteran hunter will be able to respond, without a pause: "You bet they are!"

Whether you are a first-time visitor to southeastern Montana or an 'old timer' wishing to expand your hunting opportunities, we hope this guide will be of assistance to you.

Happy hunting!



Some Facts About Southeastern Montana

Terrain

Southeastern Montana, administratively termed "Region 7" by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, offers a tangled diversity of land and vegetative patterns. It's a vast, wide-open country carved by geological forces into an incredible array of topographic extremes. And it's not completely "flat as a pancake," as some may think. Granted, there are some stretches where it's so flat that the sun rising on a strutting sage grouse casts a shadow that seems a mile long. Yet there are other areas where if you turned in a circle and viewed your surroundings, you would swear you were in the forested mountains of western Montana.

In general, most of the limited timber in southeastern Montana grows on a series of prairie islands or rolling hills studded with ponderosa pine and juniper. The unforested areas are predominantly grasslands or grassland-shrub mixtures dissected with shallow coulees.

The rivers of southeastern Montana, when viewed on a map, form an impressive network. Bordering southeastern Montana on the north is the Missouri River and its "Breaks" country. Of its two principal southern tributaries, the Musselshell and Yellowstone, the latter has its own tributary system--a large number of streams including the Big Horn, the Tongue, and the Powder rivers.

Weather

Southeastern Montana is a land that vacillates between the extremes of sweltering heat and bitter cold. Thus, hunters should be prepared for all kinds of weather. An old Montana saying: "If you don't like our weather, hang around for five minutes and it'll change," may sound a bit folksy, but in actuality, there's a lot of truth to the statement.

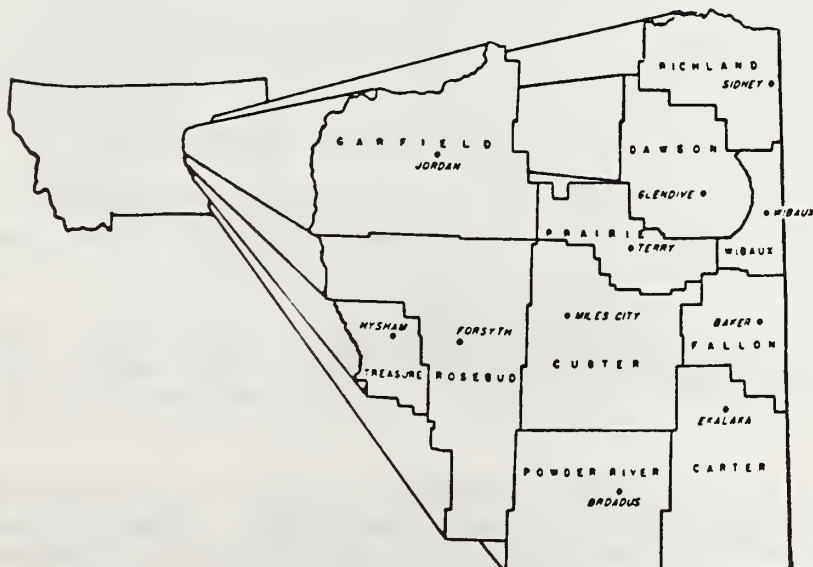
Although weather is an unpredictable commodity, the following temperature summary for the Miles City area of southeastern Montana can serve as a yardstick for predicting temperatures during the hunting season.

Temperatures (°F)

Month	Daily Maximum	Daily Minimum	Record Highest	Record Lowest
September	73.8	46.4	106	20
October	61.3	35.5	93	9
November	42.7	21.3	75	-23



Counties in Region 7



Find A Place to Hunt

Hunting in southeastern Montana (Region 7) occurs on private, state and federal lands. Private lands comprise about 75 percent of the total land area (31,000 sq. miles) in Region 7. Interspersed among private lands are state (6 percent) and federal (19 percent) lands, with the latter consisting of Bureau of Land Management (BLM), national forest and national wildlife refuge lands.

For the most part, ranchers and farmers in recent years have been generous in granting hunter access to their lands. That policy has changed in recent years due to a variety of reasons.



It is your responsibility to firm up a place to hunt on private lands. We recommend that you arrive at your hunting destination a couple days prior to the hunt so that you can explore hunting opportunities with private landowners. For further assistance on finding a place to hunt, see page 10 on the department's block management units.

Hunters should note that there has been an increasing trend toward both leasing and charging trespass fees on private lands south of the Yellowstone River. This should be considered before planning a hunt in this area of southeastern Montana.

The Department does not provide a listing of those landowners who charge a trespass fee or who have leased their lands out to outfitters.

Remember, in Montana you must have the landowner's permission (written or oral) to hunt big game on private property. Asking for permission is your responsibility, as well as the law.

It is also the hunter's responsibility to conduct himself in an exemplary manner while on private lands. How the property is treated by you will determine, to a large degree, whether you and other sportsmen will be welcomed again. When requesting permission to hunt by telephone or in person, such calls or visits should be made at reasonable, "common sense" hours -- not at 4 a.m. on opening day!

Public Lands

In addition to private lands, there are over 3.8 million acres of public domain (BLM, national forest and national wildlife refuge) lands in Region 7. A large percentage of BLM land is open to the public although driving to it on a rancher's private road over his deeded property constitutes trespass. Even where public roads lead to public land, hunters should show courtesy by checking with the rancher who leases grazing rights on that land. Sometimes there are good reasons why a herd of livestock should not be disturbed. Again, many Montana ranchers will grant access across their private lands when properly asked, and many will even volunteer directions to where game can be found.

Hunting activities on federal lands are subject to both state and federal regulations. For information on specific regulations and activities permitted, write to:

- * Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 110
Lewistown, MT 59457
- * Bureau of Land Management
West Miles City, P.O. Box 940
Miles City, MT 59301
- * Forest Service
Custer National Forest (Ashland Division)
Ashland, MT 59003
- * Forest Service
Custer National Forest (Sioux Division)
Camp Crook, South Dakota 57724



Department-Controlled Lands In Region 7

Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area

Location: This picturesque wildlife management area, located in Treasure County west of Hysham near the old town of Myers, comprises approximately 1,277 acres.

Entrance to the area is via exit 67 from Interstate 94 at Hysham, then 7.9 miles west and north on Highway 311 to the Isaac Homestead direction sign, then north 1.6 miles on a graveled county road to the management area.

Special Attractions: A diversified river-bottom habitat of cottonwood groves interlaced with meadows, sloughs and grain fields provides optimum conditions for a variety of wildlife species. Huntatable populations of deer, pheasant, cottontail rabbits and many species of waterfowl are present. However, waterfowl hunting on this stretch of the Yellowstone is not permitted within the confines of the normal stream flow, including all islands, sloughs and sandbars.

Because the Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area is administered primarily for wildlife and hunting, little of the area is developed. No campgrounds or boat ramps are available.



Elk Island Wildlife Management and Recreation Area

Location: The area lies in Richland County approximately two miles southeast of Savage. Access is from Highway 16 between mileposts 32 and 33, then one mile northeast on an all-weather county road.

Special Attractions: The Elk Island site comprises approximately 1,200 acres--656 acres are owned by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 20 acres are leased from Burlington Northern Inc., 369 acres are leased from the Department of State Lands, and 162 acres of Natural Resource lands are administered by the BLM.

Within this large tract of prime wildlife habitat, populations of white-tailed deer, pheasant and fox squirrels provide excellent hunting. Sharp-tailed grouse, Canada geese and mallards also occur in the area.

Unlike at Isaac Homestead, waterfowl hunting is permitted on this stretch of the Yellowstone. Several sloughs and small ponds in the area provide a cattail and rush habitat for nesting waterfowl and furbearers. Many islands provide additional opportunities for excellent whitetail and pheasant hunting. A boat launching ramp allows access to the river and islands. To ensure a quality wildlife habitat for game and nongame species, little development has occurred in the area.

Seven Sisters Wildlife Management and Recreation Area

Location: The Seven Sisters area is located 10 miles southwest of Sidney in Richland County. Access is from Highway 15 at milepost 41, then one-half mile east on a graveled county road.

Special Attractions: The area, which comprises 365 acres, is bordered by approximately three-fourths of a mile of Yellowstone River side channel. Cottonwoods, grain fields, meadows and backwater sloughs provide diversified habitat for many wildlife species.

Seven Sisters furnishes good hunting for a variety of game species, including pheasant, white-tailed deer, fox squirrel and waterfowl.

Because the main recreational pursuit at the area is hunting, development is minimal.

Block Management Hunting Units

Through cooperation with private landowners and federal land agencies, the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks does manage a limited number of lands for big and small game hunting in southeastern Montana. Information on these units can be obtained by writing to: Information Officer, Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Rt 1, Box 2004, Miles City, MT 59301, or phone (406) 232-4365.

What are Block Management Units?

The Block Management program was established by the department on a pilot basis in 1985 to address landowner concerns with increasing numbers of big game hunters requesting access to their lands. The main focus of the program centers on maintaining free public access to limited private lands which provide big game hunting opportunities. Landowners participating in the Block Management Unit program are assisted by the Department in the management of sportsmen and at reducing interruptions to normal farm and ranch operations associated with providing hunter access. A variety of landowner incentive packages, using sportsmen license dollars, are utilized by the department to reward landowners who cooperate with the department in establishing block management units.

What other information should I know about Block Management Units?

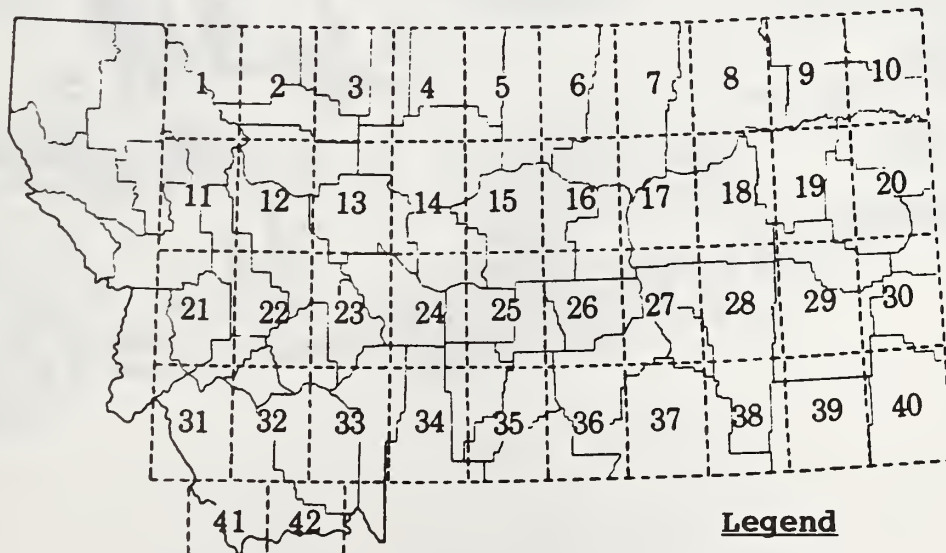
1. A brief, but informative information bulletin with a location map can be obtained through the Miles City Regional office for each of the block management units that are available to sportsmen in southeastern Montana. The bulletins are not available until the middle of September.
2. Permission slips - Hunters must obtain a written permission slip from either the landowner or the department's resource manager who is responsible for the unit.
3. Some units are operated on a walk-in only basis. Hunters are required to park their vehicles in designated parking areas and then walk in from that point to the hunting area. Sportsmen should check with the landowner or resource manager for instructions on game retrieval.
4. The established block management units are not extensively advertised and will not be until it is felt that enough land is available to accommodate those hunters desiring to hunt these areas.

5. The block management unit that you hunt on may be designated only for hunting certain species. Be sure that you check with the landowner or resource manager on what you can or can not hunt.
6. A fringe benefit from the establishment of block management units is that many of the units allow access to public domain lands that were in the past not accessible to sportsmen.



Selecting A Map to Assist You

Bureau of Land Management recreation maps, which identify private, state and federal lands within Montana, can be obtained by writing to: Bureau of Land Management, West Miles City, P.O. Box 940, Miles City, MT 59301. These maps now cost \$1 each. When ordering BLM maps, use the following index map for selecting those you desire.



Legend

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 17. U.L. Bend | 28. Rosebud |
| 18. Haxby | 29. Custer |
| 19. Circle | 30. Fallon |
| 20. Savage | 38. Tongue |
| 27. Sumatra | 39. Powder |
| | 40. Box Elder |

Topographical Maps

To obtain maps showing the topographical features of the land, write to: Western Distribution Branch, U.S. Geological Survey, Box 25286, Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225.

If you are inquiring for the first time, ask for the index map for Montana. This map is free and consists of a large map of Montana divided into grids. Each grid represents one available map. Individual grids are occasionally subdivided. Use this index first to determine those maps you wish to order.

Forest Service Maps

Individual National Forest and travel maps of each National Forest that show restrictions on vehicular use can be obtained by writing to the U.S. Forest Service, Northern Region, Federal Building, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807.



Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge

If you are interested in hunting on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range in eastern Montana, you can obtain area regulations and a general map by writing to: Refuge Manager, C.M.R. National Wildlife Range, Box 110, Airport Road, Lewistown, MT 59457; or phone: (406) 538-8707.

County Landowner Maps

Region 7 comprises 11 counties. Nine of these (Carter and Richland counties excluded) provide maps that show lands and names of private landowners. Information on the costs of these maps can be obtained by writing to the following offices:

County	Office
Custer	City-County Planning Office P.O. Box 910 Miles City, MT 59301
Dawson	Dawson County Courthouse Clerk & Records Office Glendive, MT 59330
Fallon	Little Beaver Conservation District ASC Office Baker, MT 59313
Garfield	Garfield Conservation District Jordan, MT 59337
Prairie	Prairie Co. Conservation District Box 217 Terry, MT 59349
Powder River	Powder River Courthouse Clerk & Recorder Broadus, MT 59317
Rosebud	Rosebud Conservation District Box 1200 Forsyth, MT 59327
Treasure	ASC P.O. Box 146 Hysham, MT 59038
Wibaux	Soil Conservation Service P.O. Box 249 Wibaux, MT 59353

Questions Commonly Asked By Hunters

1. May I skin and quarter my deer or antelope in the field?

Yes, but hunters taking big game must retain evidence of sex and species. The evidence of sex requirement is met when the head, horns or antlers are left naturally attached to the whole carcass or a front quarter. If the head is removed, some other external evidence of sex (either scrotum, penis, testicles for male animals or udder for female animals) must remain.

2. What steps do I have to take if I want to transport a processed (cut up and wrapped) big game animal?

The game tag (properly validated) must remain with the processed meat, preferably taped on the top package or top of cooler or box for ease in checking. When hunters are returning home, either flying or driving with processed meat, no evidence of sex is required from that time on. **QUARTERED MEAT IS NOT CONSIDERED PROCESSED. EVIDENCE OF SEX MUST REMAIN ATTACHED.**

3. I am going deer hunting with friends in southeastern Montana, but I am going to have to leave camp early. Should I be successful, can my friends transport my deer back home for me when they are through hunting?

Yes. A licensed deer hunter can have his animal transported by another person provided it was legally taken and the tag is validated and attached to the carcass in a visible manner. We also recommend that a written note of authorization listing: 1) date of kill, 2) location of kill, 3) species and sex of animal being transported, 4) origin and destination of the animal, 5) name, address and home phone number of person killing the animal, and 6) the name, address and home phone number of individual transporting the animal.



4. Can a camo-orange hunting vest be legally used for hunting big game?

If the camo-orange hunting vest has at least 400 square inches of fluorescent orange, then one is legally in compliance with the law.

5. Does Montana have any regulations on using steel shot for waterfowl hunting in Montana?

In 1987, the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks completed the information education phases of implementing the use of steel shot in designated steel shot areas of the state. As of 1988, the use of steel shot is now mandatory for hunting waterfowl in all areas of Montana.

6. Is steel shot required for hunting upland game birds in Montana?

No. Steel shot requirements apply only to the taking of ducks, geese, sandhill cranes, tundra (whistling) swans, coots and snipe. While upland game bird hunters may use lead shot, they must remember they cannot possess lead shotshells while taking or attempting to take waterfowl. Example: You are hunting pheasants and a pair of teal flush from a small pond. You cannot shoot at those ducks if you have lead shotshells in your gun, or in your possession. The same applies if a flock of geese were to fly over.

7. If I shoot a deer that appears to be diseased, emaciated or unfit to eat, can I be issued a new license?

In some instances, a hunter will shoot and tag a big game animal which is unfit for human consumption. Hunters who have shot such an animal may obtain a free replacement tag. No replacement tag will be issued unless the animal is turned in to the department along with a written statement by a licensed veterinarian stating that the animal is unfit for human consumption. No replacement tag will be issued if the lack of fitness for human consumption is due to the hunter's improper handling or care of the animal.

8. Can I legally shoot a marked big game animal?

Hunters may encounter big game animals that have radio collars, neck bands or other markers. It is legal to shoot such animals, but markers and radios must be returned to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The Department asks that if hunters have a choice, that they not shoot collared animals.

9. I am a nonresident and plan to bring my 14 year old son/daughter along with me on my hunting trip to Montana. Does Montana require that youths have a certificate of competency showing that a course in the safe handling of firearms has been taken?

Yes, nonresident hunters 12-17 years of age must show proof (a certificate of completion) of successfully completing a course in the safe handling of firearms in any state or province before purchasing a Montana hunting license.

10. A common question asked by hunters is: "Where can I shoot a big buck?"

Despite Boone and Crockett standards, each hunter has his own individual definition of a "big" buck. One can't argue that the number one deer on the Boone and Crockett list is, indeed, a life-time trophy deer. But on the other hand, a yearling forkhorn also can be a big buck, especially if it happens to be a hunter's first deer. Certainly, the concepts of "big" and "quality" lie solely in the eyes of the beholder.

"Rocking chair" bucks make up the smallest segment of all healthy deer populations and are usually found only in quality habitat. Serious hunters that consistently take good-sized bucks in Region 7 do a lot of scouting and spend a great deal of time and effort in their pursuit of a trophy buck. The average deer hunter--unless he's lucky-- simply does not have the time, expertise or desire to compete with a dedicated big buck hunter who knows the lay of the land and how to use it to his or her advantage.

While we realize that the very largest trophy heads may not be the main concern to most people, at least some people are concerned about this subject, so it should be addressed. The largest typical Montana mule deer ever recorded is number 87 in Boone and Crockett records. Only 10 of 318, or 3%, of typical mule deer in B&C records are from Montana. The largest non-typical mule deer is number 35 in B&C records and only 15 of 254, or 6%, of non-typical mule deer in B&C records are from Montana. The largest antlers for Montana white-tailed deer fare better, number 6 and 13 for typical and non-typical respectively in B&C records. Overall, only 18 of 546 (4%) typical and 16 of 313 (5%) non-typical white-tailed deer from Montana are in the Boone and Crockett record book.

The indications are, that for whatever reasons, Montana mule deer do not produce world record type antlers. White-tailed deer may have more potential, but even here, Montana has never produced many of the world record class deer.

Records for Montana clearly indicate that a normal component of very large bucks for both mule deer and white-tailed deer have been harvested in the last 10 years as compared to the previous periods in "the good old days". Most of the recent large bucks have been taken since 1980, especially during 1983, 1984 and 1987.

11. Can I legally hunt upland game birds with another hunter who is hunting big game?

Yes. However, we do recommend that the bird hunter wear a hunter orange or fluorescent vest or coat.



Tips to Prevent A Ruined Hunt

Big game hunting is a favorite sport for many in southeastern Montana. Unfortunately, many enjoyable hunts are ruined because of failure to take a few simple steps to comply with regulations.

Montana's game laws and regulations are many, and for good reason. The required licenses, tags and permits pay for managing fish and wildlife and provide sportsmen with an equal chance for a successful day in the field. Other rules are meant to care for the well-being of fish and wildlife and to assure that this valuable part of Montana's heritage will not be wasted or lost.

Following are some tips that can help hunters avoid an unhappy outing:

Game Tags: When you have killed your game animal, immediately cut out the proper month and day from the carcass tag supplied with your license and attach it to the carcass so that it will be visible at all times. If the meat is processed and packaged, the game tag should be taped to the outside of the container bearing the meat. The tag should always remain with the meat -- not the antlers or horns. For rules on maintaining evidence of sex and species, check current regulations.

License Transfers: No license transfers are allowed in Montana. In other words, shooting a game animal with someone else's tag or attaching your tag to an animal that someone else has killed is prohibited. This law is strictly enforced.

Trespass: The 1985 Montana Legislature passed a new law stating that a member of the public has the privilege to enter or remain on private land by the explicit permission of the landowner or his agent or by the failure of the landowner to post notice denying entry onto the land.

However, even if lands are not posted, recreationists are urged to seek landowner permission before pursuing any activities on private lands. If permission is granted, the landowner may revoke the permission by personal communication at any time. Also, because the posting of a notice closing land may, in some cases, revoke privilege previously extended, recreationists are urged to recontact landowners whenever new posting is observed.

Notice denying entry to private land must consist of written notice on a post, structure or natural object or of notice by painting a post, structure or natural object with at least 50 square inches of fluorescent orange paint. In the case of a metal fencepost, the entire post must be painted. This notice must be placed at each outer gate and all normal points of access to the property, as well as on both sides of a stream where it crosses an outer property boundary line.



Because landowners are no longer required to post the entire perimeter of their lands to deny access, it is the responsibility of the recreationist to determine whether private lands are posted. If lands are posted, it is the recreationist's responsibility to obtain permission from landowners before recreating on these lands.

Importantly, the new law does not change the requirement that all big game hunters must obtain permission from landowners before hunting on private lands. Permission is required even if the lands aren't posted.

The law also extends the authority of state game wardens to enforce the criminal mischief, criminal trespass and litter laws to all lands being used by the public for recreational purposes. Recreational purposes are defined in the law to include hunting, fishing, swimming, boating, water skiing, camping, picnicking, pleasure driving, winter sports, hiking and other pleasure expeditions.

Checking Stations: Each hunting season there is much confusion about which hunters have to stop at game checking stations and which hunters do not. The answer is actually quite simple. ALL hunters must stop at designated checking stations regardless of whether they have had a successful hunt. Hunters must stop on their way to and from hunting areas if they encounter a check station on their route of travel.



The primary purposes of checking stations are to collect harvest information from hunters and to aid in the enforcement of Montana's game laws and regulations. The collection of this data is important for determining the condition of Montana's big game herds and, subsequently, the future of big game hunting in the state. As such, checking stations serve an integral part in Montana's game management programs. The age, sex and location at which harvested animals were taken can provide valuable information about the status of game animal populations. Hunter success as it relates to the availability of hunting opportunities in specific areas also can be determined. It is, likewise, important to know how many hunters have been unsuccessful on their hunts.

Other functions of game checking stations include assisting hunter by providing information, monitoring hunter distribution and densities, and managing special late season or controlled hunts. These activities have become essential parts in the design of game management programs that provide for optimum game populations and a maximum level of hunting opportunities.

Hunting or Shooting From Roadside Right-Of-Way

Shoulders, berms and barrow pits of public (county, state, federal) roads are off-limits to shooting and hunting with firearms.

The Department generally interprets "road right-of-way" to include all lands extending from the road surface to bordering fence lines. For those places where there are no fence lines, the Department generally interprets "road right-of-way" to include all lands within 30 feet of the centerline on each side of the roadway. In cases where a fence line exists on only one side of a roadway, the appropriate interpretations for each side would apply.



Montana's Stream Access Law

Montana law allows certain water-based recreational activities to take place between the ordinary high-water marks of a river or stream and states that some types of activities, such as big game hunting require landowner permission.

Because of the significant implications of this law to both landowners and recreationists, the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has produced a separate brochure that discusses this law in detail. The Department recommends that recreationists review the contents of this brochure before using any Montana waterway for recreational purposes. Copies of this free brochure are available at all Department offices and most license dealers. Specific questions concerning the law should be addressed to the Department's Conservation Education Division in Helena (call: 444-2535).

For more information concerning recreation related laws, contact the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Law Enforcement Division, 1420 E. Sixth Ave., Helena, MT 59620 or phone (406) 444-2452; or the regional office at Miles City (232-4365).

The Department also maintains a toll-free Turn In Poachers number. Call: 1-800-TIP-MONT (847-6668).

The Responsible Hunter

One of the pleasures of hunting is that the hunter is on his own, away from the confines of asphalt and steel. But just because the city is left behind, the hunter is not relieved of all of his obligations and responsibilities. As in any other endeavor, hunting carries with it a certain set of rules, both ethical and legal.

Respecting game laws and obeying them is one responsibility. These laws, adopted from the recommendations of trained, professional wildlife personnel, are designed to protect our valuable wildlife resources. Legal hunting will not endanger the existence of any species since the harvest is regulated to assure that a sufficient breeding stock remains to replenish the area.

Although some hunting laws are complicated and sometimes confusing, it is the hunter's primary duty to familiarize himself with these laws and to abide by them. And if abiding by them means he must spend some pre-season hours armed only with a pair of binoculars, learning to identify waterfowl on the wing, then it is his moral obligation, to himself as well as to his sport, to do so.

A second responsibility is to hunt safely and courteously. The hunter owes it to himself and to others in the field to respect the power of his firearm (or his bow) and to refuse to hunt with those who don't practice responsible hunter safety. Remember, safe hunting is no accident!



Respecting the rights, property and requests of those who own Montana's private lands is a further, but equally as important, responsibility. Hunters need to realize that landowners do have the right to fence, post and otherwise limit access to their properties as they see fit, within the confines of the law. Hunters also should realize that their personal actions on private lands may influence landowner attitudes toward the hunting fraternity as a whole and determine the availability of these lands for public hunting and other recreation in the future.

Miscellaneous Information

- For information regarding motels, restaurants, locker plants, commercial campgrounds and horse, boat or vehicle rentals, contact the Chamber of Commerce in the largest town in the area you plan to visit. Request information pertaining to the specific areas you are interested in hunting.
- Out-of-state hunters can obtain additional licenses, such as bird, turkey, fishing, bear and archery licenses, from local license dealers. Most towns have at least one license dealer (usually a sporting goods store or a hardware store). Fishing, bird hunting and waterfowl hunting regulations also will be available at these dealers.
- Outfitters and Guides - Persons interested in obtaining an information bulletin listing licensed outfitters and guides in Montana should contact: The Board of Outfitters, Montana Department of Commerce, 1424 Ninth Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. Nonresidents are not required to be accompanied by a guide while hunting in Montana.

The Department does not recommend specific outfitters. However, it suggests that hunters contact one or more guides in the areas they desire to hunt for information on prices and services offered. Also, a good rule to follow when negotiating with an outfitter is to request a written contract stating the services that will be provided. Such a contract protects both you and the outfitter from any misunderstanding that may occur later. A reputable outfitter will not object to such a written contract.

- Exceptions to the hunting license requirement -- No hunting license is required to hunt coyotes, red foxes (swift fox, however, are protected), rabbits or prairie dogs. These animals may be hunted at any time of the year. In reference to other nongame animals, the best rule for sportsmen to follow is to shoot only those species for which they are specifically hunting and not to take pot-shots at miscellaneous birds and animals which happen to cross their paths.

Precautions

- A heavy rainfall can quickly spell trouble for hunters trying to navigate, either by vehicle or on foot, across fine-grained soils that have received a good soaking. When wet, such soils -- commonly called "gumbo" -- become impervious and very sticky. These soils, when wet, also are hazardous because they tend to be as slippery as a wet bar of soap. Losing your footing on slippery gumbo can result in a nasty spill. Likewise, driving on gumbo-slick roads can be dangerous.
- During the months of September and a portion of October, rattlesnakes can be encountered in just about all areas of southeastern Montana. Bird hunters using dogs should be aware that rattlers can be present in most localities during the early part of the season.
- Good gear to have with you -- Although no types of gear are specifically required, any or all of the following items could help you out of any number of tough spots: tire chains, tow chain or strap, heavy duty handyman jack, ample food supplies, winter clothing, maps and compass, first aid kit with snake bite kit, shovel and radio.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return. If you move from one area to another, advise someone. Never go hunting by yourself. Plan your hunt to get back to camp before dark.
- If you do become lost or stuck, remember that keeping calm is as essential as water, food and shelter. Do not wander around trying to recognize landmarks without direction or use of a map and compass. Stop as soon as you find a suitable spot for a fire. A fire will offer heat, psychological comfort, protection against wild animals who won't come near and it may help rescuers find you. Conserving yourself is particularly important. Do only what is necessary, very carefully and after thinking it out. Hypothermia - a lowering of the body temperature which can result in death - is a particular danger in cold weather. To avoid it, stay dry and dress warmly. Be conscious of the affect wind chill factors have on temperatures.

For more information on hunting areas, hunter needs and facts about hunting in southeastern Montana, contact:

Information Section
Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Rt 1, Box 2004
Miles City, MT 59301
Telephone: (406) 232-4365

Deer and Antelope Hunting

Southeastern Montana ranks as one of the better areas in the state to hunt deer and antelope. This reality has been brought about by the department's deer and antelope management efforts, the major objectives of which include: (1) maintaining healthy and productive populations within the limits of available habitat and prevailing land uses; and (2) maximizing hunter opportunities to harvest annual surpluses in deer and antelope populations.



Deer and antelope hunting success in Region 7 has been consistently high in recent years. The region produces, on the average, about one-third of the state's annual deer harvest and about 45 percent of the state's annual antelope harvest. As a result, it would be difficult to find a Montana sportsman who doesn't have both admiration and respect for the prairie country as a big game producer. But perhaps more importantly, increasing numbers of hunters now recognize that the quality and quantity of big game habitat directly affects the kind of hunting they will experience.

Many sportsmen also are beginning to realize that game managers do not regulate wildlife populations entirely by hunting. Wildlife population trends (ups and downs) are set by environmental conditions, such as habitat quality and quantity and weather patterns dictated by Mother Nature. These factors determine herd condition, productivity, natural mortality and the growth rate of the population.

Wildlife managers can manage game populations only within the constraints imposed by environmental factors. Game managers strive to "adjust" population trends (highs and lows) through regulation of annual hunter harvest.

Other Considerations: Formulating deer and antelope harvest quotas for each hunting season is a complex process that entails more than just setting seasons on the basis of biological considerations. Season recommendations also must include social considerations, such as land ownership patterns, landowner concerns about deer-antelope crop damage on private property, hunter numbers, the amount of land closed to hunting, private lands subjected to trespass fees and hunter demand for recreation. As a result, biologically allowable harvest potentials are adjusted according to socio-political considerations.

Because Region 7 does have excellent deer and antelope populations, game managers have been able to enjoy flexibility in designing the kinds, numbers, and uses of deer and antelope licenses available to hunters. In previous years, game managers watched as frustrated and confused hunters tried to cope with a complex selection of more than 60 deer and antelope hunting districts. As a result, hunting districts in Region 7 were restructured to provide a simple and more understandable system for hunters.

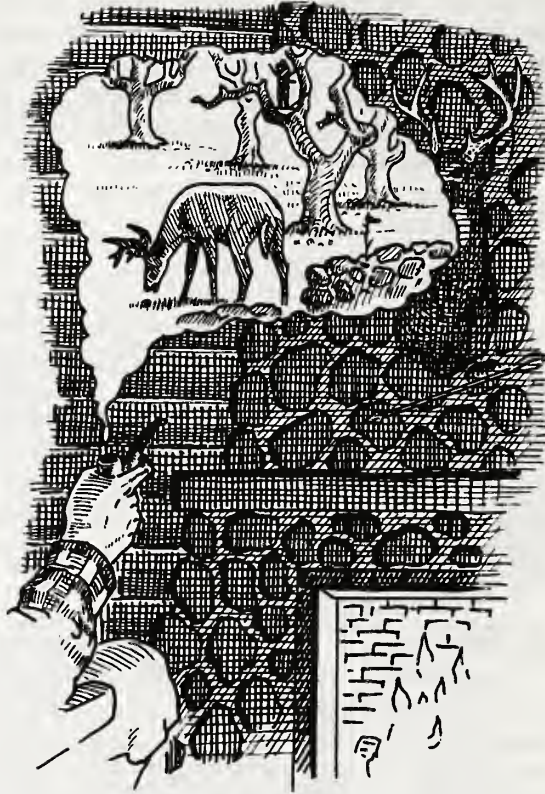
Management Flexibility: The antlerless deer "B" and antelope doe-fawn licenses, geared specifically toward the harvest of females of a species, are important and necessary management tools. Increases in deer and antelope populations can be dampened only through harvest of the productive (female) segment of the population. Deer "B" and antelope doe-fawn licenses are allocated for specific hunting districts based on harvest objectives and landowner considerations.

Because of southeastern Montana's quality habitat and relatively low hunter densities, the number of deer and antelope licenses often outweigh hunter demand during peak population years. Multiple deer "B" and antelope doe-fawn licenses (which allow a hunter to harvest two or more female deer or antelope) are issued to increase the potential harvest without increasing hunter numbers on private land. These licenses also are successfully used to attract hunters to more isolated hunting districts in the region.

Increasing stress on wildlife resources, due in part, to a shrinking habitat base, will require new approaches to managing Montana's wildlife. The result is that sportsmen and the department will have to work harder to establish better working relationships with private landowners if deer and antelope hunting is to remain as we know it today.

How Many Deer Are There In Southeastern Montana?

That's a fair question, but one that demands more than a simple answer. To be sure, your estimate will depend on your individual point of view. The hunter who sees only a few deer during a day's hunt has a different view than the alfalfa grower who has to tolerate 100 or more deer in a field each night.



There is no practical, single method that will provide an accurate count of deer numbers on both large and small areas. Suffice it to say that there are certainly more deer than most people think there are, "most people" including deer hunters, game biologists, game wardens, old-timers, ranchers and traveling salesmen.

Because populations continually fluctuate, surveys to monitor populations and trends must be conducted each year. Wildlife biologists try to determine: 1) production (fawn birth rate); 2) recruitment (survival rate of fawns to yearling age); and 3) winter mortality. Monitoring surveys also document other influences on populations, such as habitat changes, disease and general condition of the animals. These bits of information aid biologists in recommending hunting seasons to the Fish and Game Commission.

Production surveys are conducted during September and October when deer move to their wintering areas. These surveys are carried out through aerial and on-ground observations. Adult bucks, yearling bucks, does and fawns are identified. The resulting fawn-to-doe ratio, as well as, the percentage of the total population composed of fawns, provides a measure of the herd's productivity - an expression of the population's potential to replace itself through production of fawns.

Recruitment surveys are usually conducted in February and March while deer are still on their wintering areas. In these surveys, deer are classified as either adults or fawns, from which biologists determine an adult-to-fawn ratio. When compared with the results of the fall production surveys, this ratio indicates fawn survival over the winter. Overwinter survival of fawns and adult does provides an indication of a population's growth rate.

Study areas that accurately mirror deer population trends have been established in habitat types representative of those found in Region 7. From changes in actual numbers of deer observed during production and recruitment surveys in these areas, population changes in similar habitats elsewhere can be estimated.

In summary, if enough data is on hand - and quality data is one of the keys to population modeling - the department can make fairly reliable recommendations on harvest quotas. Thus, it isn't necessary to know the total number of deer present in each and every hunting district to set reasonable seasons and hunting quotas.



MULE DEER
(Odocoileus hemionus)

Other Names: Blacktail, black-tailed deer (fairly commonly used, but confusing since two smaller subspecies of mule deer along the West Coast are called "blacktails").

Characteristics: Coat gray in winter, brownish in summer; forehead and brisket dark; chin, throat, and rump patch white; tail short and round with black tip; ears large (the reason for the species' name); antler tines fork rather than all arising from the main beam; typical adult buck has four tines on each side (or five if brow tines are present); forward-tipping brow tines are typically shorter than those of whitetails or may be absent; outside flank of hind foot has slit-like scent gland up to 7 inches long; mature bucks weigh up to 250 pounds on good range.

Habitat: Grasslands, rolling sagebrush country interspersed with brushy coulees or rough breaks; riparian habitat along prairie rivers; upland areas covered with ponderosa pine and juniper.

Behavior: More gregarious than white-tailed deer; feed early and late in the day; run with tail down in bounding leaps, lifting all four feet in unison.



Reproduction: Breed in mid to late November; one or two grayish but white-spotted fawns; necks of adult bucks swell during the rut; adult bucks shed antlers in December and January; does usually breed first as yearlings (16-17 months).

Status: Numerous and healthy populations in those areas offering suitable habitat. Hunting demand does not exceed the available supply of harvestable mule deer.

More Information on Mule Deer

Mule deer can be found in practically all areas of southeastern Montana. Currently, they are distributed on about 94 percent (29,853 square miles) of the Region 7 land area, which represents about 25 percent of this species' statewide distribution. Hunting success over the past few years has averaged about 80 percent for either-sex "A" license holders.

The importance of private land for deer hunting can not be overemphasized. Private lands, which comprise 75 percent of Region 7 provide the bulk of the mule deer harvest.

Hunting Areas

Since good to excellent hunting can be found in so many localities of southeastern Montana, it is difficult to comment or point the way to preferred hunting areas. Some hunters prefer the isolated Missouri River Breaks country in North Garfield County, while others select the rolling hills of ponderosa pine in Carter, Powder River and Custer Counties. For others, the grassland-sagebrush country interspersed with brushy coulees in Prairie County ranks as a top choice.

The mule deer distribution map below has been prepared to show you where mule deer can be found in Region 7. Opportunities for access to private lands vary depending on variable factors such as hunter pressure, size of ranch units, numbers of deer and depredation problems. As pointed out in the introduction to this guide, there has been an increasing trend toward leasing private lands and charging trespass fees on private lands in those Montana hunting districts south of the Yellowstone River.

WHITE-TAILED DEER
(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Other Names: Whitetail.

Characteristics: Coat is grayish brown in winter, reddish-brown in summer; underside of foot-long tail is white; antlers consist of main beams, generally with three to five tines projecting upward; brow tines long; outer flank of lower hind foot has a small, teardrop-shaped scent gland; mature bucks weigh up to 250 pounds on good range.

Habitat: Usually associated with deciduous tree-shrub vegetation on agricultural bottomlands or coulees adjacent to both small and large streams. Other important habitat types include rolling, ponderosa pine covered hills with finger-like drainages and deciduous trees, and upland sagebrush flats with shallow coulees adjacent to wheat and alfalfa fields.

Behavior: Occupy small home ranges, do not migrate far; active primarily at dawn and dusk; secretive; solitary much of the time, but form small groups in favored feeding areas; when alarmed or running, raise and wag their tails, causing white underside to "flash".



Reproduction: Breed mid to late November; one or two reddish but white-spotted fawns; necks of rutting bucks swell (but less so than on mule deer); healthy adult bucks shed antlers in December and January; does usually breed first as yearlings (16-17 months); however, up to 30 percent of the fawns in a healthy herd in quality habitat can conceive and give birth during their first year.

More Information on White-tailed Deer

It would be difficult to find a sportsman who doesn't have admiration and respect for the white-tailed deer. In fact, the whitetail, with its intriguing biology, represents one of the most adaptable, widely distributed and highly regarded of all big game species in this country.

Whitetails occur on over 11,000 square miles of Region 7, or 36 percent of the region's total land area. About 78 percent of the whitetail population in the region occurs on privately owned lands, and about 85 percent of the whitetail harvest comes from these lands. Hunter success on the deer "A" license averages about 75 percent.

Hunting Areas

Areas that have been consistently good whitetail producers include: the Yellowstone River bottomlands in the Myers, Hysham, Rosebud, Hathaway, Terry, Fallon, Intake, Savage and Crane areas. Upland, unforested areas that are good producers include: the Richey-Bloomfield-Lindsay country north of Glendive; the Musselshell, Powder River and Tongue River bottomlands; and the rolling ponderosa pine hills in the Knowlton, Ekalaka and Ashland areas.

Hemorrhagic Disease

Deer--primarily whitetails--are periodically subjected to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD), commonly but erroneously labeled "Bluetongue" by many Montana sportsmen and ranchers. As the name suggests, the disease is characterized by extensive hemorrhaging. An epizootic is a disease that spreads quickly among certain mammals, occurring only in a large, susceptible population when appropriate conditions (hot, dry summers) exist for transmitting the agent (a virus) that causes the disease. EHD primarily strikes whitetail deer and can result in high mortality rates. Minor losses also occur in mule deer and antelope populations.

Additional Questions and Answers about EHD

- Is there any danger from human contact or consumption of deer with EHD - like symptoms?

An exhaustive review of the literature on this subject has shown no record of harmful effects from human contact or consumption of these deer. Therefore, handling, cleaning or consuming meat from an animal infected with EHD but not showing any clinical disease signs presents no human health risks.

- Can we predict where outbreaks will occur?

No. Our information data base is not sufficient enough to predict when, where, and to what extent EHD will occur. A better understanding of environmental and climatic factors associated with the occurrence of hemorrhagic disease epizootics is needed so researchers can recognize when conditions may signal an outbreak.

- In those areas of eastern Montana where EHD outbreaks have occurred in the past, do we know what percentage of local whitetail populations were or can be affected?

Since it is not possible to determine total deer population numbers for affected areas, accurate herd mortality figures can not be determined. The most appropriate classification for describing the impact of this disease on an affected whitetail area is to use the descriptive terms: mild, moderate or severe.

Despite the comments we occasionally hear on how EHD is "decimating the whitetail herds" and that we "should close the season" one has to remember that EHD has undoubtedly existed in Montana for a long time and will continue to recur. We should also remember that the whitetail is a member of one of the oldest living families of mammals on the North American continent. During the intervening time, deer have been subjected to nature's experimentation in a constantly changing environment and exposed to major ecological, geological and climatic disturbances. These tests have finely honed their ability to adjust to transitory and unstable conditions, including EHD.

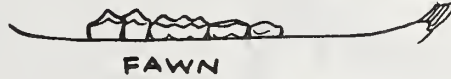
The reproductive potential of the whitetail in southeastern Montana was well demonstrated when extensive EHD dieoffs in 1976 and 1977 were followed by two severe winters (1977-78, 1978-79). Whitetails accelerated from low to high densities in approximately three years and public opinion changed from "close the season" to a long list of agricultural damage complaints.

Epizootic diseases have undoubtedly existed in eastern Montana for a long time and they will continue to recur. The presence of this disease should not serve as a deterrent to hunting deer and antelope.



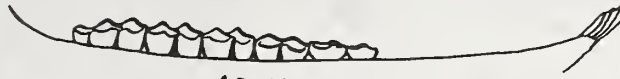
HOW OLD IS MY DEER? (IN HUNTING SEASON)

4
CHEEK
TEETH

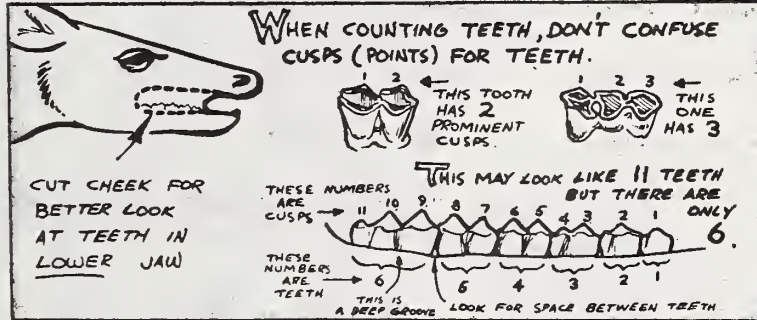


FAWN

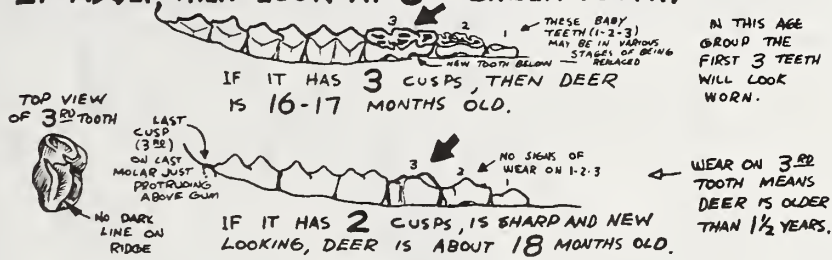
6
CHEEK
TEETH



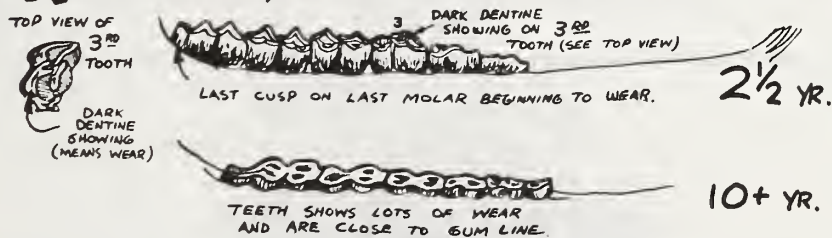
ADULT



• IF ADULT, THEN LOOK AT 3RD CHEEK TOOTH.



• AFTER 1½ YEARS, AGE IS ESTIMATED BY NOTING DEGREE OF WEAR.



PRONGHORN
(Antilocapra americana)

Other Names: Antelope, pronghorn antelope.

Characteristics: Coat is rich russet-tan with white underside; large white rump patch; two white bands across throat; black markings on head; eyes large and dark; dew claws absent; horns of adult bucks are 13-16 inches long with prongs and curved tips; horn sheaths are shed annually; about 70 percent of adult does have horns (averaging 1 1/2 inches long); adult bucks weigh about 120 pounds.

Habitat: Open, rolling sagebrush and grassland areas.

Food: Forbs in spring and summer; browse, especially sagebrush, in winter; small amounts of grasses in spring and after fall rains.

Behavior: Adult bucks are highly territorial from March through September; does and fawns in small herds drift into and out of bucks' territories in spring and summer; herds of bachelor bucks are excluded from territories; all ages and both sexes congregate in winter herds; herds drift for long distances seeking food; barriers to such movements limit populations; excited animals emit explosive snorts, exhibit white rump patches and emit a musky odor from glands in rump patches.



Reproduction: Breed in late September; two grayish-brown fawns; bucks fight viciously and sometimes fatally; territorial bucks hold harems to breed; bucks shed horn sheaths in November; females usually breed when 1 1/2 years old, but may breed as fawns.

Status: Essential sagebrush antelope habitat is decreasing due to large-scale sodbusting and conversion of smaller land parcels to dry land wheat production.

More Information on Antelope

Southeastern Montana has been widely recognized as the leading antelope factory in Montana. Approximately 45 percent of the statewide harvest occurs in Region 7.

Antelope numbers in Region 7 are currently high. During the severe winters of 1977-78 and 1978-79, antelope numbers were severely reduced. Since then, a series of mild and open winters has allowed for high production and survival of fawns.

Antelope occur on over 18,000 square miles, or 57 percent of the total land area in Region 7. This represents about 29 percent of the area inhabited by antelope statewide. About 80 percent of the land that antelope inhabit is privately owned and a corresponding percentage of the harvested animals come from these lands. Hunter success on the regular, either-sex license averages about 75 percent.

Due to accelerated access restrictions to private lands in southeastern Montana (85% of the antelope harvested in Region 7 comes from private lands), it was decided in 1987 to give hunters the option to hunt in any of the 700 series districts rather than being restricted to one specific hunting district as in past years. This flexibility has promoted better opportunities for hunter access to private and public lands. This regulation change is one integral part of an overall plan to open up more areas of private land to the sporting public which should result in a better antelope harvest.

Access - Finding a place to hunt -- Hunters should note that there has been an increasing trend toward both leasing and charging trespass fees on private lands. It is your responsibility to firm up a place to hunt on private lands. We recommend that you arrive at your hunting destination a couple days prior to the hunt so that you can explore hunting opportunities with private landowners. Information on obtaining Bureau of Land Management topographical, forest service, and county landowner maps for nine counties in southeastern Montana can be obtained through the Miles City Regional office. We would like to emphasize that some of the better pronghorn hunting occurs after the opening weekend. Hunters are few and far between and you can be well assured that there still will be alot of trophy bucks out there. We should also point out that historical weather data confirms that mother nature unleashes copious amounts of nasty weather on many of the antelope openers making for some difficult hunting and driving conditions.

How Old Is My Antelope?

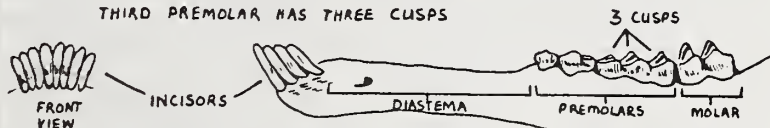
Examining and comparing the size of the incisors with each other is the quickest way to age an antelope. When the animal reaches four years of age and older, all of the permanent incisors will be large.

The following chart will give you some pointers on what to look for when examining the incisors of your harvested antelope.

ANTELOPE

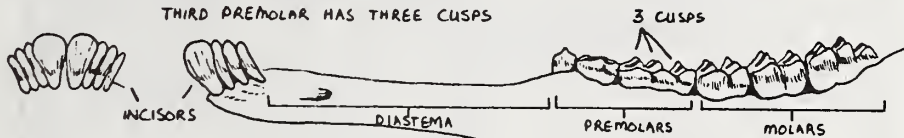
FAWN: INCISORS ARE ALL SMALL MILK TEETH

THIRD PREMOLAR HAS THREE CUSPS



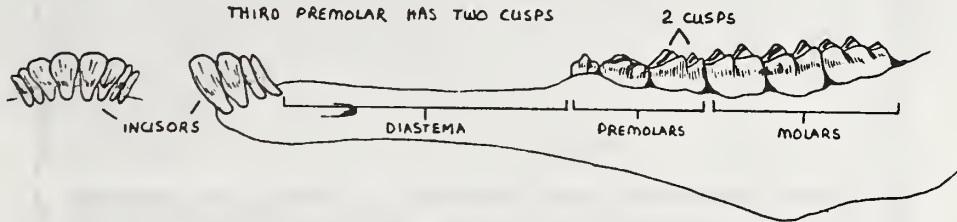
YEARLING: TWO LARGE PERMANENT INCISORS

THIRD PREMOLAR HAS THREE CUSPS



TWO YEAR OLD: FOUR LARGE PERMANENT INCISORS

THIRD PREMOLAR HAS TWO CUSPS



THREE YEAR OLD



SIX LARGE PERMANENT INCISORS

FOUR YEAR OLD +



EIGHT LARGE PERMANENT INCISORS



Choosing a Trophy Pronghorn

The official scoring system of the Boone and Crockett Club is the standard method for determining excellence of a trophy. Parameters considered are length and circumference of the horn, length of the prong and symmetry between right and left horns. Personnel of the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks can tell a hunter how to contact the nearest official measurer, as can most taxidermists. The hunter can also write directly to Boone and Crockett Headquarters, in care of the N.A.B.G. Awards Program, 1600 Rhode Island Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Choosing a good pronghorn head is not easy. Thin horns of about 13 inches, with small prongs, are common on 2 year old bucks. They are hardly trophies, but to the untrained eye they may look quite good in the field. Heavy horns of 14 inches are decent trophies, 15-inch horns are good and anything over 16 inches is probably world class, provided the prong is also sizable.

If an antelope's horns were straight, judging them would be easier. However, the shape of the hook at the top of the horn makes a big difference in measurements. Because the trophy hunter must consider the total conformation of the horns, the serious hunter should look at as many mounted heads as possible, try to judge them by eye and then measure them to check his guesses.

Most horns are deficient in one way or another. For instance, horns frequently have good bases, although their prongs are topped by only small hooks. Only by looking at great numbers of heads and pictures of trophies can a hunter become an accurate judge of conformation.



Hunters interested in first-rate trophies should use spotting scopes to check heads at a distance and should memorize the following measurements: an ear is five to six inches long; a buck's head is about 13 inches long from the tip of the nose to the back of the head, and the distance from the tip of the nose to the corner of an eye is about eight inches.



To determine if a buck is a real "trophy", first look for a good prong. If the length from the back of the horn to the tip of the prong is equal to the length of an ear, the prong is good to excellent. The curve of the hook makes the length of a horn greater than the distance it stands above an animal's head. For example, a fairly straight horn is about two inches longer than its height, whereas a sharply curved horn may be five to six inches longer than in height. Well-shaped horns standing nearly as high as the length of the head should, thus, be record class, and even straight ones of that size are good trophies. Prongs differ in their locations along the lengths of horns, but in really good trophies, tips of the prongs are at least a nose-to-eye length above the eyes. If the hooks are correspondingly large, it is a good trophy.

Trophy records are interesting and commonly serve as standards for comparison. However, many of the highest scoring heads are really freaks of nature. Thus, hunters should not feel that heads which fail to "make the book" are second-rate trophies. In fact, an average buck--if hunted on foot, stalked fairly and dropped painlessly with one shot--is more of a trophy than the largest head in the world, if taking that head involved pure luck or an unsporting hunt.

Field Care of Deer and Antelope Meat

Once a deer or antelope has been killed, it is best handled if placed on its back, preferably on an incline so that visceral removal and drainage will be from the chest cavity downward toward the hindquarters. After the viscera have been removed, the carcass should be turned belly down with legs sprawled so that blood and body fluids can drain. This should be done in a reasonably dirt-free area, preferably over brush or logs.

Contrary to what some believe, a wet cloth, if available, should be used to clean out the body cavity. Once this is done, wring out the cloth or use a clean one to wipe the cavity dry. Removing as much blood as possible is important since blood is the most active culture medium on which bacteria will grow. Such growth can quickly contaminate the meat!

Liver and heart fanciers should salvage these organs and place them in a durable zip-lock plastic bag. Add a little water to prevent excessive drying.

If the carcass has to be left at the kill site before it can be retrieved, it should be prepared for proper cooling. The importance of the word cooling cannot be overemphasized. The brisket and pelvic girdle (some hunters prefer not to split the girdle) should be split and sticks of proper length should be placed in the chest and abdominal cavities to hold the body walls apart. This will allow air to enter freely. The belly skin should never be allowed to collapse and prevent air from reaching the inside of a warm carcass.

If you are camping, don't leave the carcass on the ground--hang it in a cool, shady place. If it is impossible to hang it, place it over a shrub or log to ensure proper cooling.

Cheesecloth or commercial gamebags come in handy if you prefer to skin your animal. Such a covering will allow air to circulate around the meat and prevent flies from damaging it. If you decide to care for your meat in this way or to process it further (such as boning it out), Montana law requires that you retain evidence of the animal's sex.

The evidence of sex requirement is met when the head, horns or antlers are left naturally attached to the whole carcass or a front quarter. If the head is removed, some other external evidence of sex (scrotum, penis, testicles for male animals, or udder for female animals) must remain.

Proper transportation of a game animal is just as important as good field care. The animal should be transported in such a way that it is fully exposed to an adequate circulation of air. Too many animals spoil each year because of improper transportation practices. Stuffing an animal into a car trunk or pickup truck box is a good way to ruin a quality piece of venison or antelope. If your meat has a strong, gamey odor or taste, it may very well be the result of poor field handling.



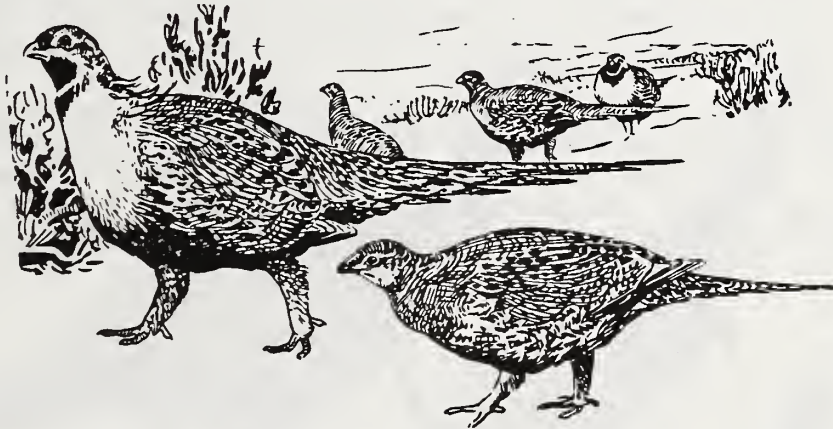
The frontier of understanding
has no limits, and the curse
of want and poverty
may yet be lifted from
the life of our species.
That frontier can not be
exploited on the same
selfish terms as the frontier
that lies behind.

Gerard Piel

Upland Game Bird Hunting

Southeastern Montana is fortunate in having been endowed with an impressive variety of upland game birds. Some of these have been on the scene since the first Plains Indians entered the portals of what is now known as Montana. Others have since been introduced in an effort to provide additional species for the sportsmen to hunt and otherwise enjoy. Some species, both native and introduced, have flourished under changing economic conditions, while some have declined. Nevertheless, they all have played a significant role in the history of the state and are a cherished part of our heritage.

Six species of upland game birds occur in southeastern Montana. Native birds include sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse and mourning doves, which are migratory. Introduced species are the ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian (gray) partridge and Merriam's turkey.



Hunting opportunities for upland game birds in southeastern Montana rank from good to excellent because of the region's wide-open spaces, diversity of habitats and limited hunting pressure.

The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks' upland game bird management program is based on the knowledge that game bird populations experience high levels of natural mortality each year. These high death rates, which are due to a wide variety of environmental factors, are countered by high reproductive rates. Each breeding season produces a number of surplus birds that will not live until the next breeding season. As a yardstick, 65-75 percent of all game bird breeding populations are lost each year to all causes. Despite what some may think, it is absolutely impossible to stockpile game birds from one year to the next. Liberalized hunting seasons have been an important benefit of the accumulating knowledge gained from the department's research and management programs.

Annual bird management recommendations are based on annual trends of breeding populations, production of young and hunting harvest data. To be effective, hunting regulations must be flexible enough to meet changing conditions and to respond to the findings of surveys and other studies conducted throughout the year by wildlife biologists. Therefore, all seasons and limits are set on an annual basis by the Montana Fish and Game Commission. While some regulations tend to remain the same year after year, they are subject to change at any time conditions warrant a different approach. Because of this, specific information on season dates, daily bag limits and possession limits is not presented in this bulletin. For specifics on these subjects, check current upland game bird regulations.

To better assist you with your upland game bird hunting in southeastern Montana, we have attempted, in the following pages, to provide you with useful information on each upland game bird species you may choose to hunt. Yet we are also well aware that no group of hunters is more dedicated to their particular brand of outdoor sport than the waterfowler. With zeal and enthusiasm, they have given of their time, their energies and their money in an effort to make sure that web-footed species will be with us forever. Thus, we have also included a section on waterfowl.

We hope that when your day's hunt is finished you will have enjoyed plenty of good shooting opportunities and taken a limit of feathered missiles from the prairie country of southeastern Montana. We also trust you will have gained a better appreciation for what this part of the country has to offer.



MERRIAM'S TURKEY
(Meleagris gallopavo merriami)

Other Names: Gobbler, tom, wild turkey.

Characteristics: The large size, iridescent bronze plumage and naked bluish head should distinguish wild turkeys from all other birds. Males have a prominent, red neck wattle, a beard and spurs on their legs. Their back and breast feathers are tipped with black. Females are smaller, less brightly colored and generally lack a beard (a few females have beards up to 3 inches in length). The back and breast feathers of females are tipped with yellowish brown or white. Adult males average 48 inches in length and 16.3 pounds in weight, while adult females average 34 inches in length and 9.3 pounds in weight.

Habitat: Open ponderosa pine forest in rugged terrain, interspersed with grassland and brushy draws; also in numerous riparian wooded areas adjacent to streams.

Similar Species: None



Status: Introduced in a series of transplants since 1954. Fall hunting season is for both sexes; the spring season is for gobblers only. As a general rule, the turkey has been accepted with open arms by most hunters and private landowners. Large size and excellent eating qualities, combined with a reputation for being an outstanding sporting challenge, have been strong selling points for this bird. At present the population is flourishing and expanding.

Flight: When hunted, the bird may run rather than fly. Turkeys are capable of racing on powerful legs at bursts of up to 20 miles per hour. They are strong fliers that can flush like a grouse, clear treetops quickly and glide on set wings for long distances.

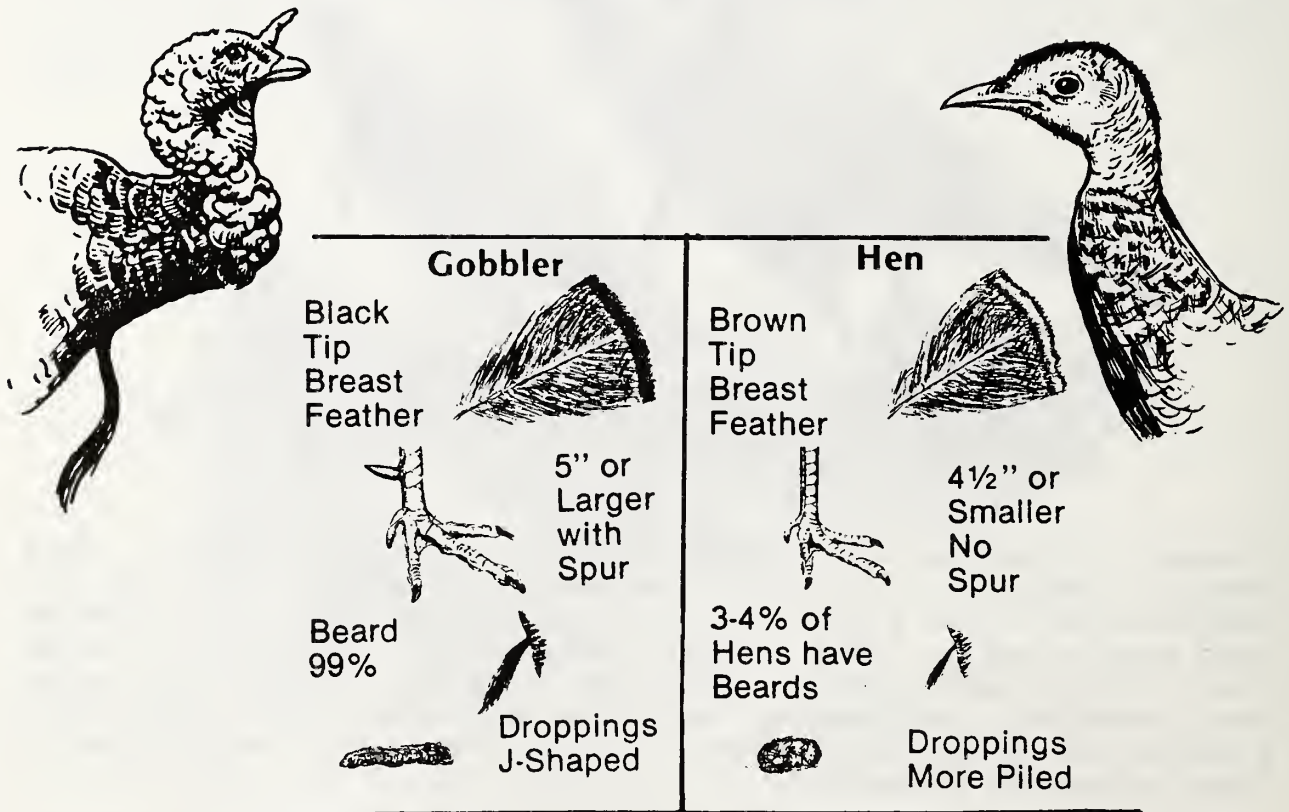
How Can You Tell Sex and Age?

The mature gobbler's typical head adornments and 'beard' (a hair-like appendage hanging from the upper breast) serve as good field markings for distinguishing a male from a female. However, up to 3 percent of hens can possess beards. Also, a gobbler's beard and head adornments are not readily visible until his second year. As a result, the only sure way to tell a gobbler from a hen is to examine the lower breast feathers. The tips of these feathers are glossy black in males and white or buffy in females. Glassing turkeys from a distance with binoculars will readily reveal this difference.

The outer two wing feathers will tell you whether the bird is a juvenile or an adult. If the feathers are sharply pointed and without transverse white bars extending to the tip, the bird is a poult (bird of the year). If the outer feather tips are somewhat rounded and the white bars extend to the tip, the bird is an adult.

Spurs are found on mature males, but are not present on females or immature males.

Physical Characteristics



The Turkey's History in Montana

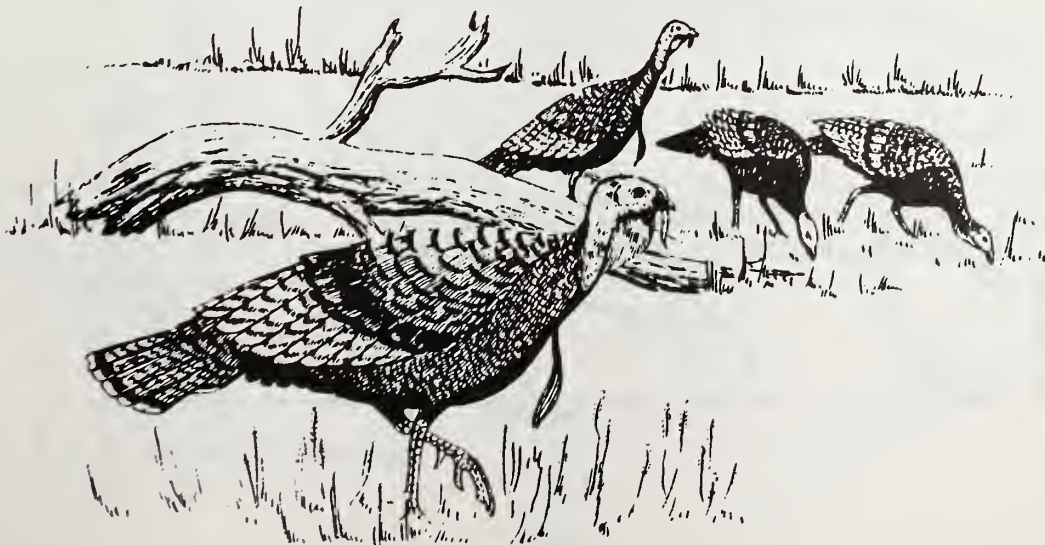
Montana which falls outside the wild turkey's ancestral range, is not a state to which the bird is native. When the Department decided to introduce turkeys into Montana, it selected the Merriam's as the best choice to achieve success. In 1954, department biologists introduced 13 birds from Colorado into the Judith Mountains of central Montana. A second release was made in 1955 when 18 turkeys from Wyoming were released into the Long Pines area of southeastern Montana. Wyoming stock also was used in the Ashland area of southeastern Montana in 1956 and 1957, when 26 birds were released. This marked the last time stock from outside Montana was transplanted. Subsequent trapping and relocating distributed turkeys in several areas of Montana.

Turkey Hunting Seasons

Montana has a spring gobbler season and an either-sex fall season. Hunters are required to purchase a turkey tag in addition to an upland bird license and a conservation license. Hunters are allowed one wild turkey per special tag per special season. Popular hunting areas include the Long Pines and Ashland areas of Custer National Forest, as well as, portions of Custer and Garfield counties and the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in north Garfield county. In recent years, a flourishing population has expanded its range in southeastern Montana to provide additional huntable flocks.

Why Hunt Turkeys in the Spring?

Despite what a small minority of people may think, spring gobbler seasons are biologically sound and do not affect turkey production or population numbers. Research in Montana and elsewhere has shown that the three-week season opening on the third Saturday in April does not interfere with the turkey's breeding activities, which occur earlier. Further, nothing suggests that a large spring gobbler harvest interferes with the reproductive potential of a turkey population. Gobblers are polygamous, with dominant males acquiring a harem of four or more hens during the season. Therefore, many surplus males, especially yearling toms, commonly exist in a flock.



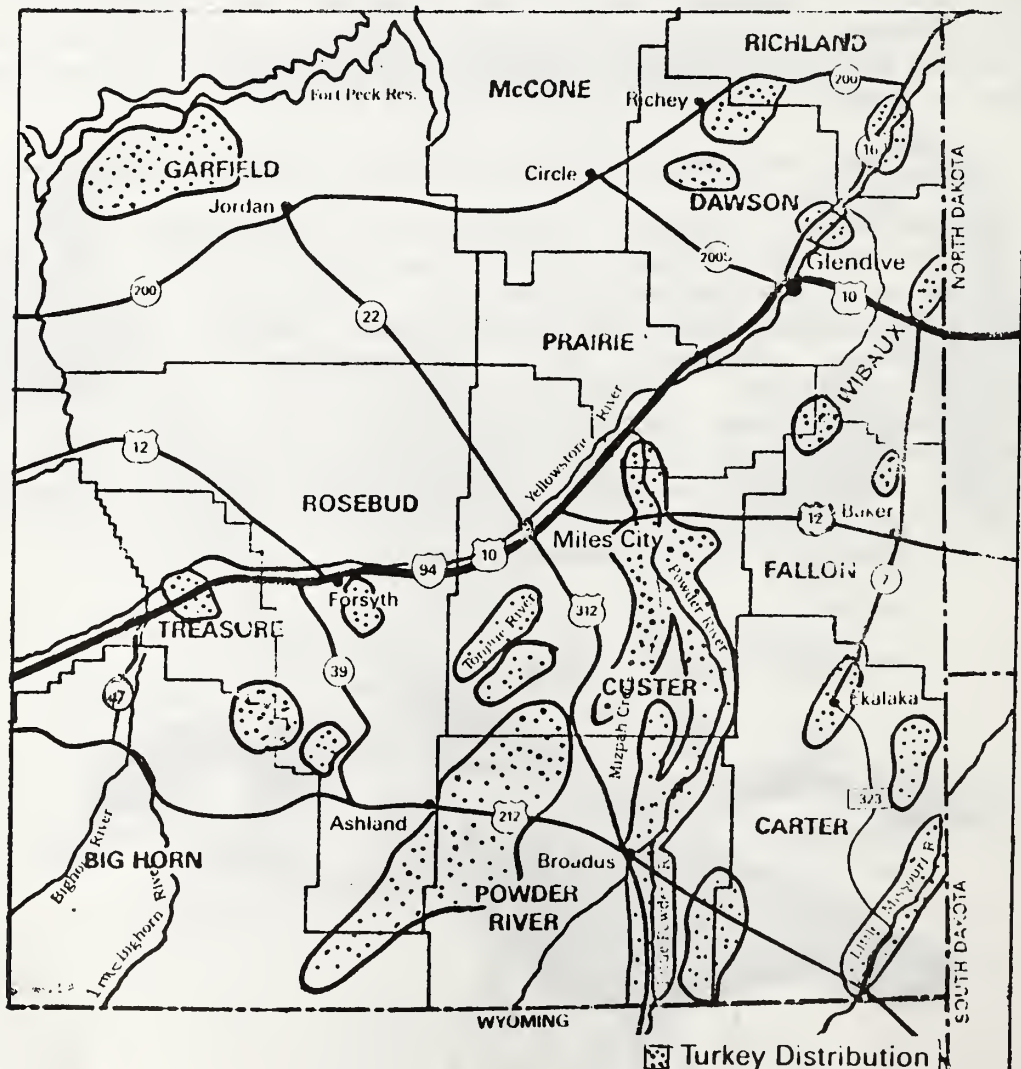
Scouting Tips

Finding a place to hunt turkeys does not present a major problem since a great deal of the hunting in eastern Montana occurs on either U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or Bureau of Land Management land. But finding turkeys can present a problem.

Preseason scouting for sign left by turkeys is the best way to find a good hunting area. Signs to look for are roost trees, droppings, feathers, and scratch and dusting areas. Also, listen for gobbling and make note of feeding areas. In timbered areas, preferred roost trees are tall, over-mature or dead ponderosa pines sheltered from high winds.

Much of the turkey range in Region 7 lies on private property. In most cases, permission is required to hunt on these lands.

Turkey Areas



RING-NECKED PHEASANT
(Phasianus colchicus)

Other Names: Chinese pheasant, chink, ringneck.

Characteristics: The adult male has a long, barred tail, iridescent coloration, a white collar and a bright red face patch. The adult female also has a relatively long and strongly barred tail, but she has a dull, mottled brown back and buff-colored breast. Adult males range from 30-36 inches in length and average 2.9 pounds in weight; adult females range from 21-25 inches in length and average 2.1 pounds in weight.

Habitat: Open grassland and cropland areas with brushy cover, especially along watercourses.

Similar Species: Female or young sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse can be confused with female (hen) pheasants or young pheasants of both sexes. However, female sage grouse have a black belly patch and feathered legs, while female pheasants have a brown belly and bare legs. Sharp-tailed grouse have a much shorter tail than hen pheasants, feathered legs and white under parts.



Status: Introduced to Montana prior to 1895. Fall hunting season for males (cocks) only. Currently, the supply of pheasants is more than adequate to meet the demands of hunters in southeastern Montana.

Hunting Tips

Since most of southeastern Montana is dominated by extensive grassland-sagebrush areas, habitat for supporting large numbers of ringnecks is not present. The ringneck has become established primarily where grain crops cultivated on dryland areas are interrupted by woody and brushy draws and where irrigation has permitted grain growing along major rivers and their tributaries. Most pheasant hunting occurs on private lands.

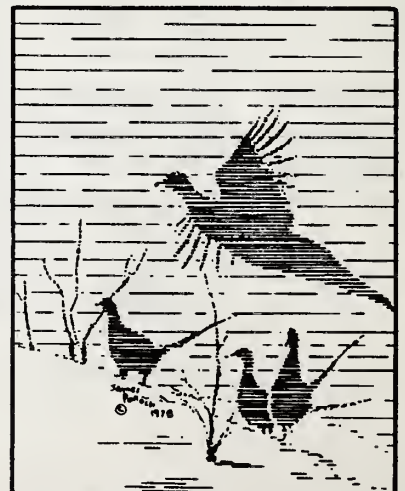
Good hunting spots are found in the following localities:

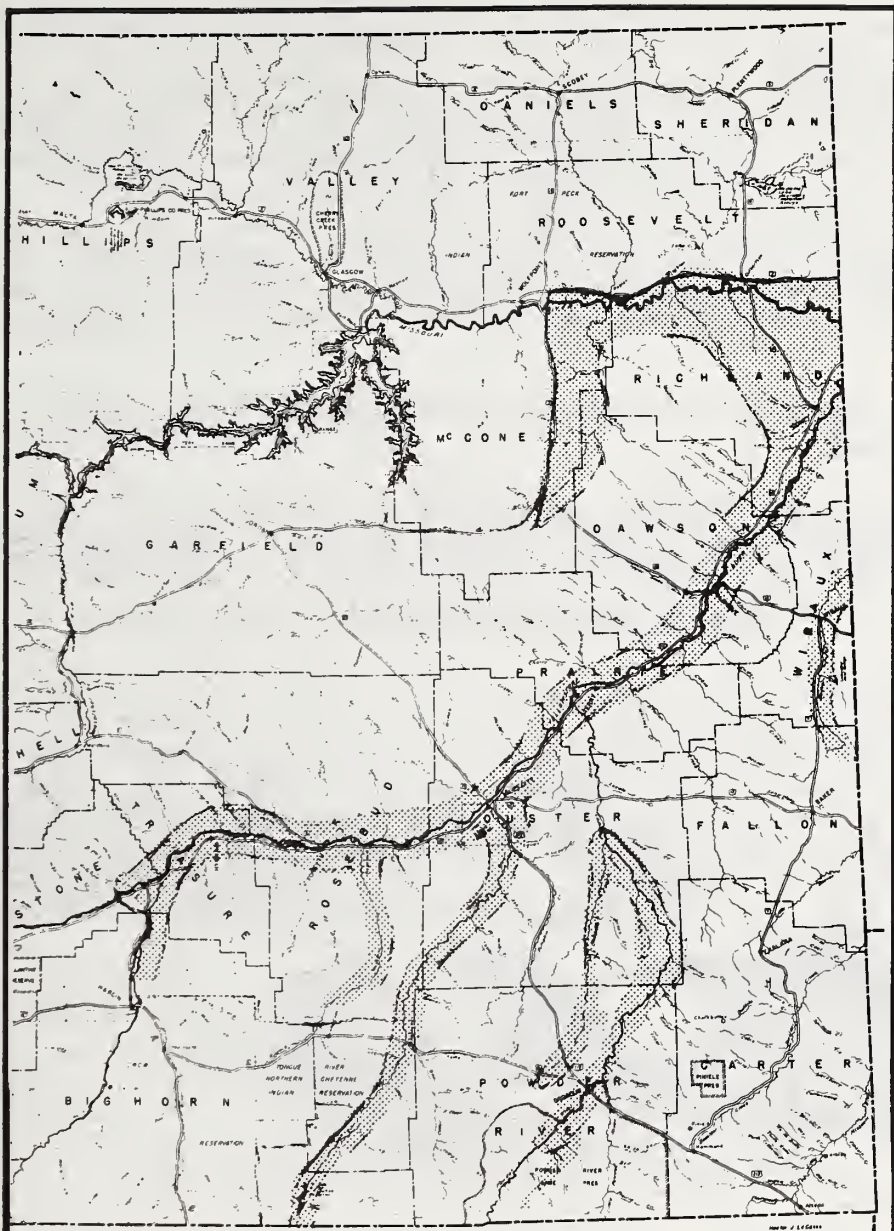
- The Yellowstone River bottomlands from the mouth of the Bighorn River to the North Dakota border where a good interspersed of woody cover and grain exists.
- The Kinsey Irrigation Project east of Miles City along the north side of the Yellowstone River.
- The north-flowing Tongue River, Rosebud Creek, Sarpy Creek, Reservation Creek, Armell's Creek and Moon Creek tributary systems of the Yellowstone River.
- Beaver Creek area from Wibaux to the North Dakota-Montana border.
- Lower Buffalo Rapids Irrigation Project between Terry and Glendive.
- Department wildlife management areas (Elk Island, Seven Sisters and Isaac Homestead).

How Many Broods Per Season?

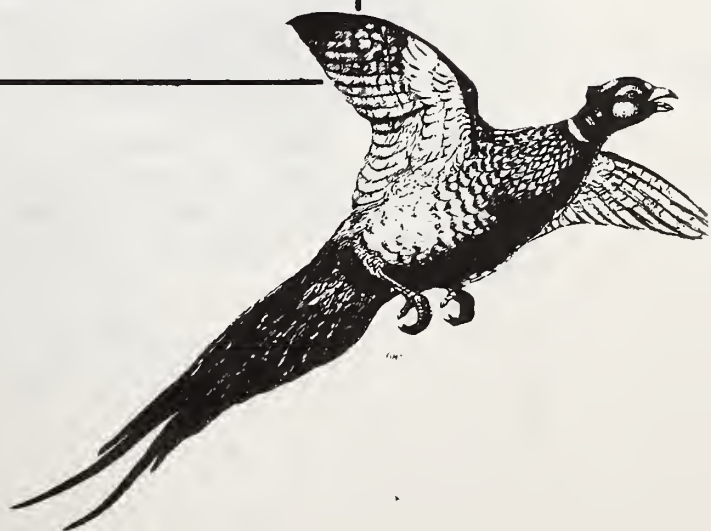
Some hunters are under the impression that a hen pheasant will produce more than one brood per season. The fact is that each pheasant hen hatches only one brood during the summer. However, if the eggs are infertile or destroyed, the hen may reneest and lay a new clutch of eggs.

Because of reneesting and later than normal hatching dates, broods of many different ages can be seen at any given time during the summer and early fall. This gives the impression that a hen produces more than one brood. One brood per season is, similarly, the rule for all of Montana's year-round, resident upland game birds.





RING-NECKED PHEASANT DISTRIBUTION - 1988



SHARP-TAILED GROUSE
(Pedioecetes phasianellus)

Other Names: Pintail grouse, sharptail, speckle-belly, prairie chicken, chicken.

Characteristics: Sexes are basically similar in appearance, although males have inconspicuous yellow eye combs and pale violet air sacs on the neck. Both sexes have feathered legs and upper parts mottled with white, buff, brown and black. The wings have conspicuous white spots, and the breast and flanks have V-shaped brown markings on a snow-white background. Adult males and females average 16.5-18.5 inches in length; adult males weigh an average of 33 ounces, while adult females average 29 ounces in weight.

Habitat: Primarily grassland interspersed with shrub and brush-filled coulees.

Similar Species: Female pheasants, especially early in the fall, can be confused with sharp-tailed grouse. Sharptails, however, have much shorter tails, feathered legs and white bellies (female pheasants are mottled brown throughout).



Status: Native to Montana. Fall hunting season for both sexes. Large expanses of grassland that are required for sharptail survival are gradually being converted to dryland wheat farming and more intensive livestock grazing. Thus, there has been a gradual decline of sharptail habitat in recent years.

Flight: When flushed, takeoff is rapid. Once airborne, sharptails turn sharply, take several rapid wing beats, glide for a short distance and repeat the pattern. Sharptails have a tendency to utter a "cac-cac-cac" chuckle in flight after being flushed.

Hunting Tips

Sharptails are the most common of all of the resident game birds in southeastern Montana and can be found in many localities. On warm sunny days, sharptails can usually be found in small pockets of trees and shrubs within shallow coulees or at the heads of draws. Sharptails especially like to "hole up" in patches of chokecherry and buffalo berry bushes.

During wet, cool and windy weather, look for grouse on grassy flats and ridges. Areas with pockets of lightly grazed grass and fairly dense grass, such as little bluestem, can be quite productive.

When flushed, a flock usually does not fly far and can often be located and flushed again.

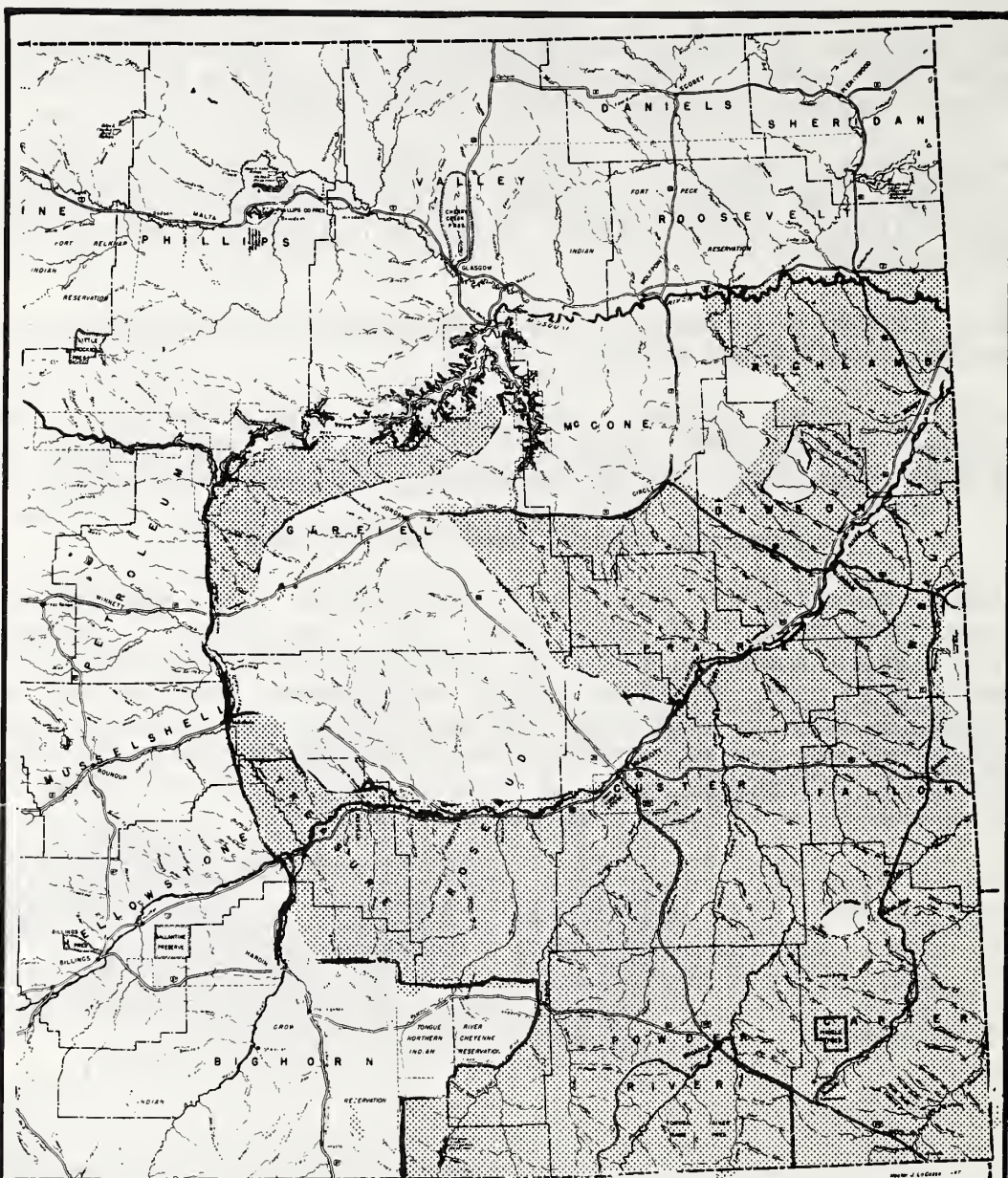
Late in the season, sharptails, regardless of whether hunted, tend to become jittery and flush at long ranges. Under these conditions they can be extremely difficult to hunt.

Sexing and Aging Sharp-tailed Grouse

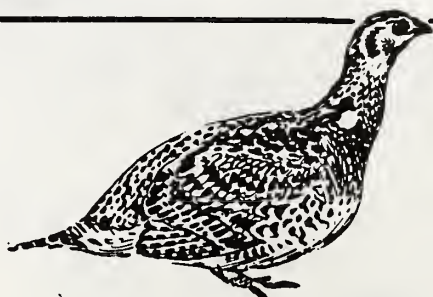
Young or Old? Ages of sharptails are determined by examining the wear on the tips of the outer primary wing feathers. The outer two primary wing feathers on young-of-the-year birds are not moulted until the second season and show a worn or frayed appearance near their outer ends. These feathers also are lighter in color than the other primaries. Birds more than one year old moult all of their primaries and have a new, rounded appearance on their outer wing tips.

Sex. Tail and crown head feathers will indicate the sex of the bird. Males have a longitudinal color pattern on the two central tail feathers, whereas females have a cross-barred pattern. The crown feathers of males are dark with buff-colored edges; female crown feathers have alternating dark and buff-colored crossbars.





SHARP-TAILED GROUSE DISTRIBUTION - 1988



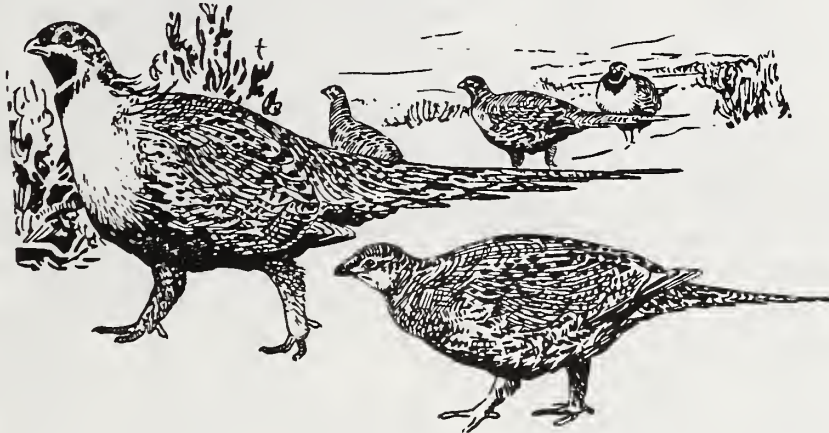
SAGE GROUSE
(Centrocercus urophasianus)

Other Names: Sage hen, sage cock, sage chicken.

Characteristics:- The largest of Montana's grouse. Both sexes have relatively long, pointed tails, feathered legs and mottled gray-brown, buff and black plumage. Males have a blackish-brown throat patch and an inconspicuous yellow eye comb. Both sexes have blackish bellies that contrast sharply with white under-wing converts when the birds are in flight. Adult males range from 26-30 inches in length and 4-7 pounds in weight; adult females range from 19-23 inches in length and 2.5-3.5 pounds in weight.

Habitat: Sagebrush.

Similar Species: A female pheasant can possibly be confused with a female or young male sage grouse. Female pheasants, however, have a brown belly and bare legs, while female sage grouse have a black belly patch and feathered legs.



Status: Native to Montana. Fall hunting season for both sexes. Sage grouse depend on sagebrush and plants associated with sagebrush-grassland ranges for food and shelter. In recent years, accelerated sagebrush removal on some private lands due to large-scale sodbusting and smaller conversions to dry-land wheat farming have decreased vital habitat.

Since sage grouse are unable to adjust to land use changes that eliminate or seriously disturb any of their seasonal haunts, their present and future existence depends upon man's ability and willingness to maintain this vital habitat.

Flight: When flushed, takeoff is steady, straight-line and lumbering. The "kuk-kuk-kuk" chuckles are much quieter than sharptail's. Females appear to dip from side to side while flying.

Hunting Tips

During late summer, sage grouse tend to concentrate around reservoirs or "green" areas that still contain succulent vegetation. When not disturbed by hunters, they are "easy marks" for the gunner. Descriptive adjectives such as "evasive", "explosive" and "erratic", which denote speed and evasive action, do not apply to this species under such conditions. After being disturbed frequently, they will flush with a more distant approach and fly further.

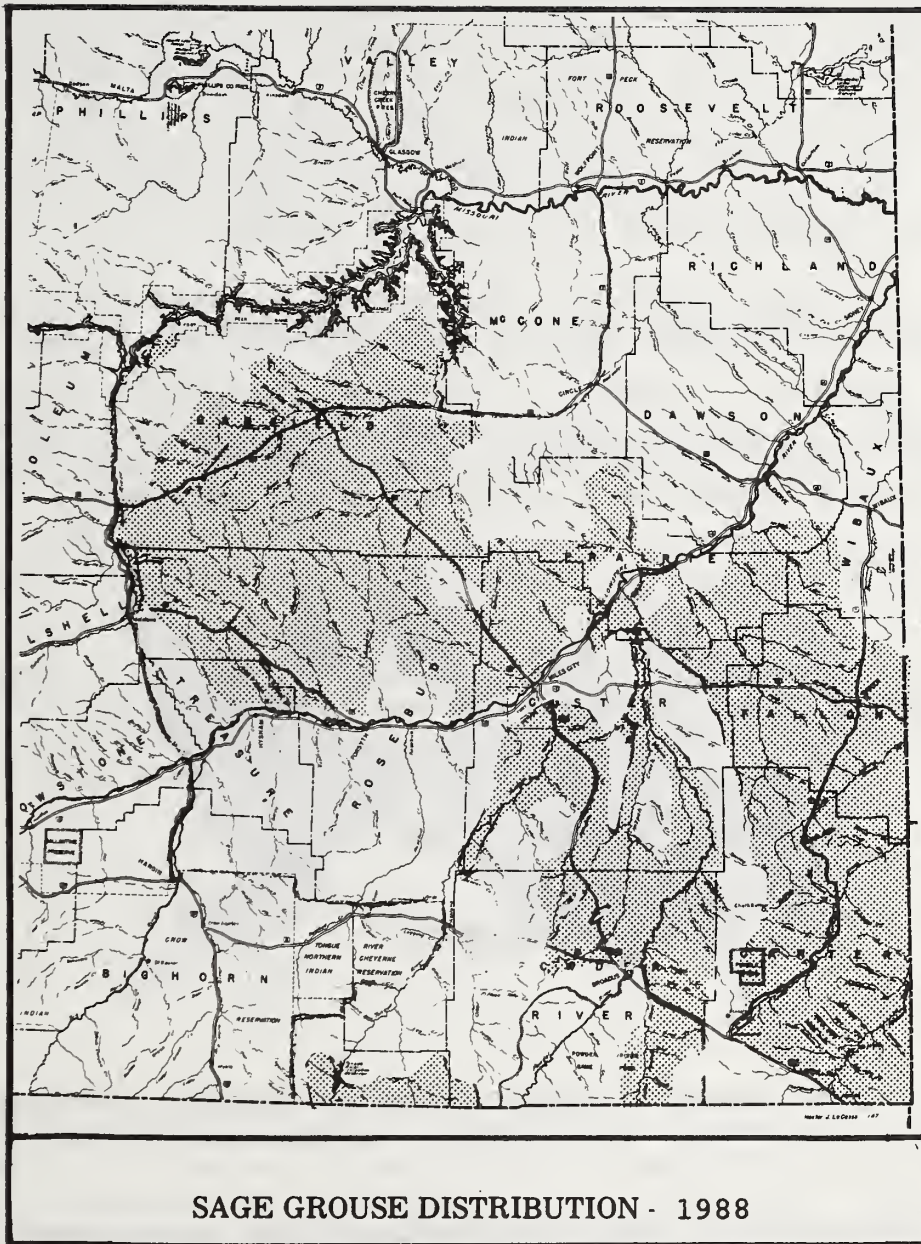
The most successful hunters concentrate their efforts in sage-covered basins encompassing a fair amount of land. Sage basins not more than a mile from water are good bets for finding grouse. Most hunters use number four or five shot, and prefer to shoot younger birds because they provide choicer eating.

Sexing and Aging Sage Grouse

Young or Old? Mature birds have a solid feather pattern, while immature birds have a triangular patch of feathers with dark spots and light, vertical streaks (through early fall). The toe color in adults is dark green; in young grouse it is a light, yellowish-green.

Sex. The sex of sage grouse can be determined by examining the longer undertail covert feathers for coloration patterns. Feathers of males are solid black tipped with white; feathers of females are black and brown with white extending from the tip down the central feather shaft. Males exhibit a considerable amount of dark brown or black at the throat and on the underside of the body, as well as white on the breast and tail.





HUNGARIAN (GRAY) PARTRIDGE
(Perdix perdix)

Other Names: European partridge, Hun, Hunkie.

Characteristics: Sexes are similar in color. The adults have cinnamon-colored heads, gray sides with vertical chestnut bars and grayish to brownish backs. The two central pairs of tail feathers are heavily barred, while the outer tail feathers are rusty brown. Both sexes may have a chestnut-brown horseshoe design on the breast, although the design is more common in males. Hungarian partridge usually flush in coveys of 10 to 15 birds. The bird's rufous tail feathers are conspicuous in flight. Both male and female adults range from 12-13 inches in length and average about 14 ounces in weight.

Habitat: Mixture of cultivated and uncultivated land; grasslands interspersed with wheat fields, weed patches and brushy cover.

Similar Species: Chukar partridge, which have a very limited distribution in Montana, are somewhat larger than Huns. They also have red bills and feet, black bars on their sides, and a light throat bordered by a prominent black necklace.



Status: Introduced. Fall hunting season for both sexes. Currently, expanding populations of Huns occur in southeastern Montana.

Flight: An explosive jet-like launch, fast speed and increased wariness with each flush. The explosive takeoff is accompanied by a loud, harsh "Kar-wit, Kar-wit" shriek.

Since the decline in Hun numbers associated with the severe winters of 1977-78 and 1978-79, Huns have steadily increased in numbers. The year 1987 was a bonanza for Hun hunting which was partially related to the easy and open winters of 1985 and 1986. Currently, many sectors of southeastern Montana offer some excellent Hun hunting. Abandoned homesteads with a shelterbelt are excellent areas to search for coveys.

MOURNING DOVE
(Zenaidura macroura)

Other Names: Pigeon.

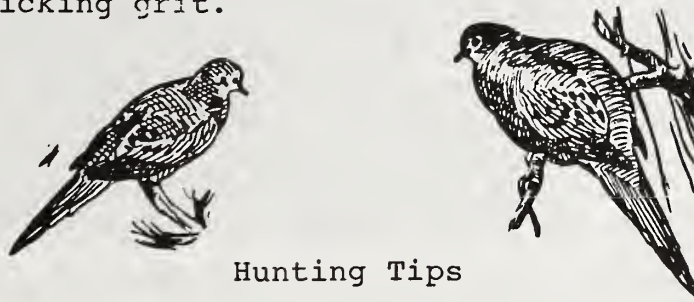
Characteristics: Small, slatey-brownish colored bird with a long, pointed tail bordered with white. Adults measure 11-13 inches in length and weigh about 6 ounces. The belly shades to a lighter pinkish brown, and the tail and wings are barred or spotted with black. Males and females are similar in appearance, although the male is brighter and has more distinct coloration. The male also has a more accentuated black spot on each side of its head. In the hand, young birds can be distinguished from older birds by a white rim around the edges of their wing shoulder feathers.

Habitat: Doves prefer woods, thickets, grasslands and grain fields. As a result, they use a wide variety of habitats in southeastern Montana.

Status: Native to Montana. Fall hunting season for both sexes. Abundant.

Flight: An elusive, fast-moving target. Their speed, erratic flight and small size combine to make them extremely difficult to shoot.

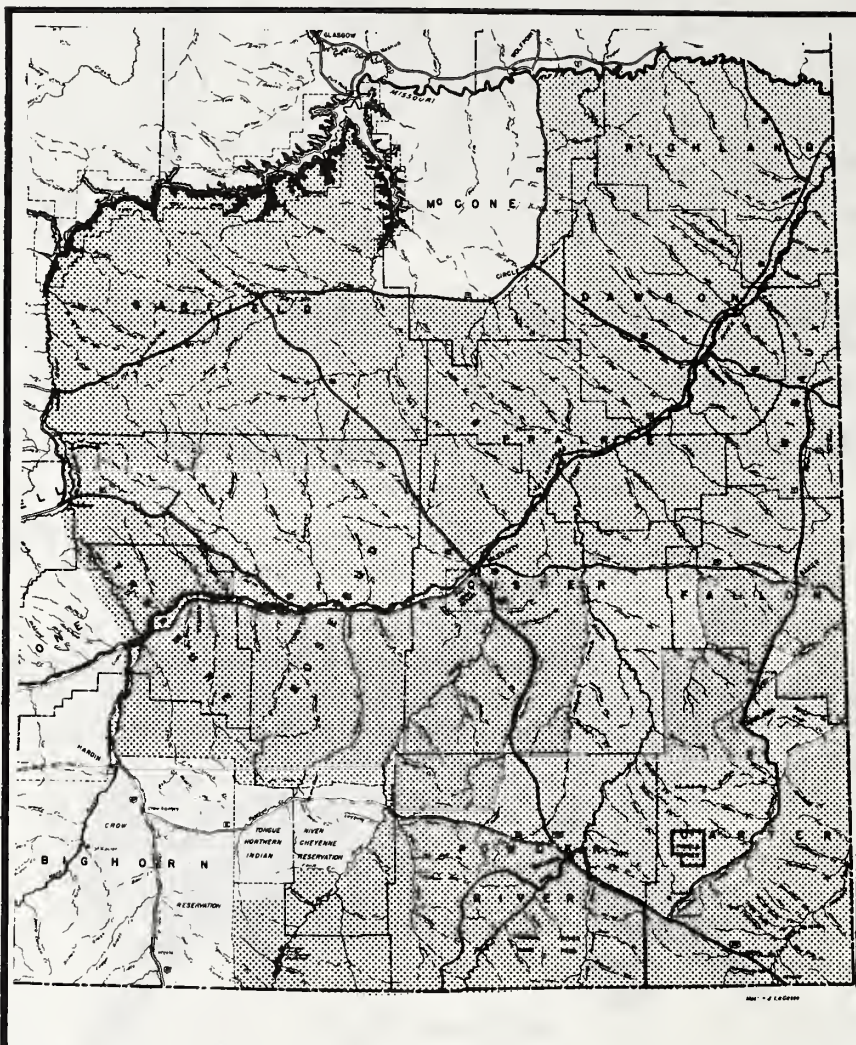
Flock Habits: Doves exhibit a strong flocking instinct in the fall before migration. As September approaches, doves can be seen in increasingly large groups while feeding, roosting, watering and picking grit.



Hunting Tips

The mourning dove is Montana's most recent addition to the game bird list and is subjected to very light hunting pressure. Doves should be hunted as early in the season as possible since they have a tendency to migrate south at the first sign of cold weather. Wooded or brushy areas, preferably close to water and grain fields, are excellent areas to hunt. Small wooded groves lying low in valleys or near sloughs also are good choices. Rivers and streams can be productive, too, especially if they are close to feeding or roosting areas. Doves also find abandoned farms attractive. When hunting doves, it is wise to take along three or four times as many shells as you normally would for hunting grouse.

Reminder: Since doves are migratory birds, dove hunting is regulated by federal, as well as, state laws. Dove hunters must use "plugged" guns -- that is, shotguns which hold no more than three shells (two in the magazine plus one in the chamber).



MOURNING DOVE DISTRIBUTION - 1988



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING

● Choice Eating: Game meat tastes better when properly cared for and prepared. With this in mind, hunters interested in choice eating might consider these suggestions:

-- Promptly remove the entrails from all game birds killed. This stops the chemical action of digestive juices, reduces odor and speeds the cooling process. If the birds can't be cleaned right away, keep them in the shade.

-- Should birds be destined for the frying pan, skinning is a quick way to remove their feathers. An easy way to clean freshly shot upland game birds is to stand on the base of their wings and pull the legs slowly toward you. The breast will separate from the entrails. Place the breast in a clean bag or cooler. Skin and remove the legs from the other half of the body and the job is done.

-- Upland birds are difficult to pluck without ripping their skin. However, dunking the birds in scalding water or plucking birds while they are still warm will help.

-- The body cavity of birds to be roasted should be thoroughly rinsed and dried before the birds are packaged. Trapped blood, which imparts a "wild" taste, can be drawn out of muscle tissue by soaking the birds overnight in a water-vinegar solution.

● Hunter Assistance with Wing Collection: During each hunting season, thousands of wings from upland game birds are turned in to department personnel from cooperative hunters throughout the state. Analysis of wing feathers from hunter-killed birds provides information on sex and age ratios and indicates reproductive success ratios and population trends. Such information plays an important role in the management of upland game birds.

Hunters wishing to cooperate with this program can obtain wing collection envelopes at the department's Miles City regional office. However, a paper bag will work just as well. Game bird wings should be cut at the first joint and inserted into the collection envelope or bag with information on the date and locality (county) where the bird was shot.

Collected wings can be turned in to the Fish, Wildlife and Parks regional office in Miles City, to department employees or to personnel at game checking stations.

Hunting Dogs

Picture the scene: During the second weekend of Montana's pheasant season, a carload of pheasant hunters pull up to an irrigation ditch along the Yellowstone River for a quick cup of coffee before starting the hunt.

One of the men lets his yellow lab out for some exercise after the long drive. The dog ranges up the fence line to investigate a few weathered posts, but before the men have poured their coffee, the dog has retrieved a rooster crippled by a previous hunter. By the time they have finished their coffee, a second cripple is in hand.



The lesson: Without firing a shot, the dog's owner already has collected half of his daily bag limit -- which is about the only "disadvantage" of hunting birds with a fine gun dog.

Few will deny that the use of a dog increases the productivity of most bird hunting expeditions. That's true whether the quarry is grouse, pheasants or waterfowl. In fact, in some areas of the Big Sky Country, there are hunters who would rather stay home than hunt without their dogs at their sides.

But even more importantly, the use of retrievers annually saves many birds that otherwise would be lost. Scores of wounded game birds go unretrieved each fall by hunters without dogs, which is a tragic loss of a valuable Montana resource.

One study conducted in north-central Montana, during which over 2,000 pheasant hunters were interviewed, showed how valuable a hunting dog can be. Those hunters using dogs bagged an average of 40 percent more pheasants per hunter and spent 22 percent less time bagging each bird than hunters without dogs. In a follow-up study, crippling losses by hunters without dogs were nearly double those of dog users.

To summarize, the service of a good, properly trained bird dog is one of the ultimate pleasures in hunting. For hunters lucky enough to own one, the dog quickly becomes such a vital part of the affair that its absence makes the gunning a bit on the bland side, like a good home cooked meal without proper seasoning -- it's still good and most enjoyable, but the spice is gone.

Waterfowl

Southeastern Montana lies in the Central Flyway and every fall thousands of migrating ducks and geese pass through the region. Eastern Montana also raises its own fair share of ducks and geese.

GEESE

Thanks to good, sound management, waterfowl hunters can look forward to putting more Canada geese on the dinner table both now and in the future. The resident goose population in the lower Yellowstone River Basin now stands at more than 5,000, an increase of several hundred percent since the 1950's. As a result, the department has liberalized goose hunting regulations in eastern Montana to provide the maximum harvest possible within the guidelines established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Two races of Canada geese, the giant Canada goose and the Great Basin Canada goose, are native to Montana. The lesser Canada goose and the cackling goose appear during migration in eastern Montana. Birds taken by hunters commonly weigh between 13 and 15 pounds.

Most of the best decoy shooting for resident and migrant geese occurs in grain fields adjacent to the Yellowstone, Bighorn and Tongue Rivers. Some of the larger reservoirs in the Yellowstone Basin also are good choices for placing decoy spreads. The best hunting generally occurs on the opening weekend and in November when the birds are migrating. Rosebud, Treasure, Custer and Dawson counties currently provide the best goose shooting.

Hunters are reminded that the Yellowstone River is closed to waterfowl hunting between the mouth of the Bighorn River and the Rosebud-Custer county line. This closure includes the confines of the normal streamflow and includes all islands, backwaters, sloughs and sandbars.

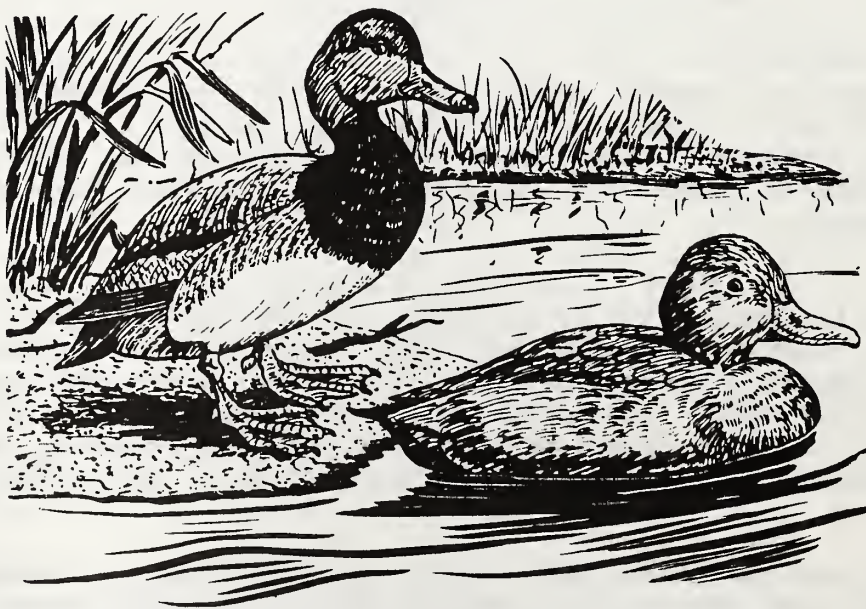
DUCKS

Southeastern Montana contains a myriad of stockponds and reservoirs many of which provide good duck hunting for both jump shooting and decoy hunters. Mallards, blue and green-winged teal, gadwalls and baldpates make up the bulk of the puddle ducks shot. That reach of the Yellowstone River open to waterfowl hunting provides some excellent shooting over decoys for mallards in November when the outlying reservoirs freeze. Decoy hunting for mallards in wheat and corn stubble fields also provides choice hunting.

Hunting of ducks and geese is under the control of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, which sets guidelines each year for the various states to follow in establishing seasons, bag limits and other regulations. Since these regulations often call for different limits of different species of ducks and geese (and sometimes different season dates), it is important that all waterfowl hunters attain some proficiency at identifying waterfowl "on the wing".

Each year the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks publishes regulations that outline the seasons, limits, legal firearms and lawful methods of taking ducks, geese, snipe, sandhill cranes, tundra swans and other waterfowl species.

In addition to a valid federal duck stamp, waterfowl hunters are required to purchase a conservation license and a state waterfowl stamp. An upland game bird license is not required to hunt waterfowl in Montana. Hunters are again reminded that steel shot is mandatory for hunting waterfowl in all sectors in Montana.



The Conscientious Waterfowler

Crippling Loss of Waterfowl: Hunters shooting waterfowl over water without the use of a dog are prone to incur high crippling losses. Shooting in poor light, failure to mark downed birds and delayed retrieval of downed birds also are poor practices to follow. Thus, a well-trained dog is invaluable to a waterfowler. Shooting at an effective range with the right size shot also is a proven way to reduce crippling losses.

When a flock of ducks or geese is in range, it's a good idea to shoot at one bird until it falls. Some wounded birds fly a long way. Therefore, always watch for "gliders" or birds that suddenly fold up and drop from the sky. A quick retrieve will end the suffering of wounded birds and save the time required to look for ones that hide in thick cover.

Good wing shots hit waterfowl with the middle of their patterns, and thus wound fewer birds. Practice on the trapshooting range and a knowledge of shotgun ballistics pays off greatly while hunting. Take time to properly shoulder your firearm and keep the barrel moving as you shoot. Also, don't be in a hurry to pull the trigger.

Matching the right choke and shot-shell load with the game bird pursued and hunting conditions are things that every conscientious wing shot should attempt to do. Compare the patterns of different pellets at various ranges. Also, keep in mind that adequate loads at the start of the season may fail later in the fall when the birds become fully feathered.



Endangered Visitors: Whooping cranes, which sometimes visit southeastern Montana on their way to and from their nesting grounds at Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada, may be seen in the same area as, or in the company of, sandhill cranes, swans or snow geese. Efforts to save these birds from extinction have included foster-parenting, migration research and strict protection from disturbance. Less than 100 whooping cranes still exist in the wild. To assure them safe passage through the state, hunters are reminded to watch for whoopers when afield.

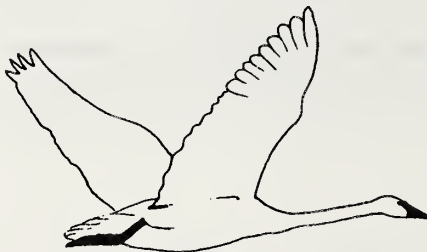
Adult whooping cranes are tall, white birds with black legs and wing tips. Their rusty-colored young resemble sandhill cranes. To avoid accidentally shooting a whooping crane, become familiar with the differences between a whooping crane and these other birds:



WHOOPING CRANE



SANDHILL CRANE



TRUMPETER OR TUNDRA SWAN



SNOW GOOSE

If you sight a whooping crane, please contact the Miles City regional office (232-4365). These reports will help alert other hunters in the area to the crane's presence and add to our growing knowledge of crane migrations.



HUNTER ALERT NETWORK

It's always a good idea for hunters who plan to be afield for more than one day or for those traveling to distant hunting areas to leave word with someone at home about their expected hunting locales, arrival and departure dates, etc. The importance of doing so becomes quickly apparent when emergencies arise and hunters must be contacted in the field.

Law enforcement agencies, emergency services organizations and radio stations throughout much of southeastern Montana maintain a "Hunter Alert Network" for notifying hunters in the field in the case of emergencies. To aid authorities in locating you, should doing so become necessary, please complete the form before you begin your hunt, clip it out and either leave it with your family or mail it home once you reach your destination.

Most radio stations in southeastern Montana carry emergency notifications (of death, serious illness, etc.) for hunters as close to 6 a.m., noon and 6 p.m. as possible during the regular big game seasons. Citizen Band (CB) radio operators in Montana also handle emergency messages.

The emergency operation center of the Miles City Police Department - (406) 232-3411 - is the central clearing house for all messages. Please tell those at home to confirm all emergency messages before they contact the central clearing house.



HUNTER ALERT EMERGENCY FORM

(Leave with Family or Mail Home)

From Town Of: _____; State Of: _____

Name: _____

Description of Vehicle: _____

License # and State: _____; Type: _____

Color: _____

Hunting Area (If Known): _____

Planned Hunting Dates: _____

Name of Rancher, Guide, etc.: _____

Nearest Town (If Known): _____

Local Phone Number (If Known): _____

MONTANA

MOUNTAIN STANDARD TIME

TABLES

FOR DETERMINING HUNTING HOURS
DURING PERIODS OF DAYLIGHT
SAVINGS TIME, ADD 1 HOUR

ZONE 4

INCLUDES: Valley, Daniels, Sheridan, Roosevelt, Garfield, McCone,
Richland, Treasure, Rosebud, Prairie, Dawson, Wibaux, Custer, Fallon,
Powder River and Carter Counties.

	Oct.		Nov.		Dec.	
Day	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.
1	6:01	5:44	6:44	4:49	7:25	4:19
2	6:03	5:42	6:45	4:48	7:26	4:19
3	6:04	5:40	6:47	4:47	7:27	4:19
4	6:05	5:38	6:48	4:45	7:28	4:19
5	6:07	5:36	6:50	4:44	7:29	4:18
6	6:08	5:34	6:51	4:42	7:30	4:18
7	6:09	5:33	6:52	4:41	7:32	4:18
8	6:11	5:31	6:54	4:40	7:33	4:18
9	6:12	5:29	6:55	4:39	7:33	4:18
10	6:13	5:27	6:57	4:38	7:34	4:18
11	6:15	5:25	6:58	4:36	7:35	4:18
12	6:16	5:23	6:59	4:35	7:36	4:18
13	6:17	5:21	7:01	4:34	7:37	4:18
14	6:19	5:19	7:02	4:33	7:38	4:18
15	6:20	5:17	7:04	4:32	7:39	4:18
16	6:21	5:16	7:05	4:31	7:39	4:18
17	6:23	5:14	7:07	4:30	7:40	4:19
18	6:24	5:12	7:08	4:29	7:41	4:19
19	6:25	5:11	7:09	4:28	7:41	4:19
20	6:27	5:09	7:11	4:27	7:42	4:20
21	6:28	5:07	7:12	4:26	7:42	4:20
22	6:30	5:05	7:13	4:25	7:43	4:21
23	6:31	5:04	7:15	4:25	7:43	4:21
24	6:33	5:02	7:16	4:24	7:44	4:22
25	6:34	5:00	7:17	4:23	7:44	4:23
26	6:35	4:59	7:19	4:22	7:45	4:23
27	6:37	4:57	7:20	4:22	7:45	4:24
28	6:38	4:55	7:21	4:21	7:45	4:25
29	6:40	4:54	7:22	4:21	7:45	4:25
30	6:41	4:52	7:24	4:20	7:45	4:26
31	6:43	4:51			7:45	4:27



Read not to contradict
and confute,
nor to believe and
take for granted,
nor to find fault
and discourse, but
to weigh and consider.

Francis Bacon

ASK FIRST!!

to ***Hunt & Fish*** on **Private Land**

GIVE A TIP ... MONTANA

TIP
TURN IN COACHERS



CALL:

1-800-TIP-MONT (847-6668)



***Montana Department of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks***

1420 East Sixth Avenue • Helena, Montana 59620